



Stevenson, O., Parr, H., Woolnough, P., and Fyfe, N. (2013)
Geographies of Missing People: Processes, Experiences, Responses
[Online]. Project Report. University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK.

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GEOGRAPHIES OF MISSING PEOPLE

PROCESSES, EXPERIENCES, RESPONSES
www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk

GEOGRAPHIES OF MISSING PEOPLE: PROCESSES, EXPERIENCES, RESPONSES

2013

Olivia Stevenson, Hester Parr, Penny Woolnough and Nick
Fyfe

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ISBN: 978-0-85261-936-0

FOREWORD

In police crime investigations, whether in fact or fiction, much use is made of behavioural and geographic analysis and predictive profiling. From these two latter perspectives little has been established about how missing adults behave. As the authors of this important study point out, research on missing adults is incomplete, with most attention being paid to children and young people who go missing.

Until now no research or study has been available to help explain why adults go missing and to explore their experiences.

Paying attention to the experiences of missing people is important for a number of reasons. It aids our understanding of why people go missing, what missing people think about, and how they plan and decide what to do and where to go.

The record of experience in the following pages will help develop policy, help build prevention strategies and supporting provisions for missing people and their families. As such, this report has an immediate relevance and utility in evidence-based operational practice.

It also shows us that public awareness needs to be raised and platforms for

talking about missing issues need developing, making it easier for people to ask for help. We need good practice across multiple-agencies and care services and this report builds our research base and will lead to further studies aimed at safeguarding people.

From a policing perspective, translating the learning from this research study into evidence-based practice and then synthesising it with other practice will lead to huge improvements in safeguarding our most vulnerable people.

This is a research study of true value and importance and it is a pleasure to welcome and commend this work.



Joe Apps
Manager – UK Missing Persons Bureau
<http://missingpersons.police.uk>

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Geographies of Missing People: processes, experiences and responses, is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (REF 062-232-492) and is a partnership between the Universities of Glasgow and Dundee, the Scottish Institute for Policing Research and Police Scotland. The team has worked in collaboration with The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), UK Missing Persons Bureau (Serious Organised Crime Agency) and the charity Missing People.

The authors wish to thank all the research participants for taking part in the interviews – for their openness, generosity and willingness to talk about their experiences – without them this research would not have been possible.

Special thanks to Police Scotland and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) for their support with sampling and recruitment. In particular Dr Penny Woolnough, Senior Research Officer with Police Scotland and Detective Sergeant David Bullamore from MPS.

Thanks to the Advisory Group for their helpful comments throughout the project: David Alexander, Joe Apps, Jane Birkett, Sue Black, Lucy Holmes, Jacqui Karn and Colin Menzies.

Thanks to Martin Muir (www.academicdigital.co.uk) for his help with preparing this report for print and for photography and web support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Missing people have a presence and an impact in our everyday lives. A person in the UK is recorded as missing by the police approximately every two minutes and a wealth of agencies – police, charities, health, social workers – are charged with searching for, and supporting those left behind. However, there is a paucity of UK based qualitative research conducted directly with adults reported as missing about their experiences. The *Geographies of Missing People* research study has been designed to explore why adults leave, but more particularly, where they go and what happens while they are missing. The overall intention of the research is to create a new space of enquiry around missing experience, with direct reference to the people who experience its profound effects (and see also Parr *et al* (forthcoming) ‘Searching for missing people: families and missing experience’).

AIMS & METHOD

Designed with the support of both charitable and police partnerships, Police Scotland and The Metropolitan

Police Service (MPS) and with reference to the voices of the people concerned (qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face with forty-five adults), this in-depth study aims to provide a rich and detailed account of ‘going missing’. For more information on the ethical and methodological aspects of this study, see the technical appendix: 113.

CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

The Police and Missing People charity formally recognise an adult’s right to ‘be missing’ and official definitional changes that acknowledge such absence came into effect in 2013 (ACPO 2013). Yet, defining what it is to be missing is recognised as complex and no clear consensus within and between agencies and those reported as missing exists. Indeed, the term ‘missing person’ is mostly used by those ‘left behind’ meaning that any ‘group identity’ for adults who experience being reported as missing is effectively non-existent. Although there is a greater appetite for ‘Prevention, Protection and Provision’ around missing persons issues across the policy and practice

landscape, what still remains unclear is an informed understanding of the journeys undertaken whilst reported as missing, and the exploration of the social and spatial dimensions of adult missing journeys in general.

KEY FINDINGS

The research has identified key components of missing journeys for adults and the data-driven findings emphasise the anatomy of missing journeys to illustrate the social and spatial terrain of missingness with the view to providing practical insights for those with responsibility for and to missing adults.

The key components of the report are summarised below:

Characteristics of the sample interviewees

- » There is a 60:40 urban-rural split.
- » Approximately 50:50 male and female.
- » All were over 18 years old with over ninety percent of the sample aged between 22 and 59 years.
- » Interviewees are almost exclusively white (Scottish, British).
- » Employment status was a more or less equal split between employed and unemployed.
- » A high proportion of interviewees reported mental health issues (both diagnosed and undiagnosed) and thirty-three percent attempted suicide whilst reported as missing.

- » A third were living alone prior to being reported as missing;
- » All returned or were traced, with females returning sooner than males.
- » Fifty-three percent returned or were located within forty-eight hours, but twenty percent remained missing for longer than seven days.

Leaving

'It was just like I've had enough I can't cope with this, I need time and space for myself' (Trish).

The drivers leading to adults being reported as missing are multifaceted and include:

- » Historic and current traumatic experiences.
- » Strong emotions relating to being unable to cope.
- » Feeling trapped and powerless to talk about or share their feelings.
- » Indications that an adult might have intentions to go absent were present and these are indicated to services and significant others through verbal and behavioural cues related to stress and depression.

Locations

'Directions I chose weren't premeditated it was just a need to keep moving. But I gravitated towards paths that I had been along before' (Leon).

- » The initial sense of elation felt by adults is replaced by 'crisis mobility', where a sense of crisis accompanies the need to make decisions on 'where to go' and 'how to travel'.
- » The majority mode of travel was by foot, followed by car and bus equally.
- » Adults avoided crowded places and also CCTV surveillance systems, but tended to stay local and visit familiar environments.
- » Adults are attuned to the environments they are in and how to navigate them to stay safe, avoid getting lost, go undetected and gain space to think.

Encounters

'I knew I had to stay away from authority, and I had to stay away from people I knew because they were already looking for me' (Eliza).

- » Adults grapple constantly with the 'fear of being looked for and wanting to be found' and this influences their engagement with the environment they are in and the ways they avoid detection.
- » Adults feared encounters with the police or people known to them and used both the built environment and natural environment to hide, and this ranged from taking shelter out of the public eye, changing physical appearance, going by a false name, avoiding CCTV, changing clothing and/or staying with

friends who won't disclose their whereabouts.

- » Missing journeys were not risk-free and adults revealed encounters with significant others on their journeys that may shelter or conceal them or facilitate drug and sexual activities.

Safety

'I walked along the canal and then found a little wood off the road and found a very secret place to bed down. The main priority is not to be noticed by the police. I wasn't that worried about being attacked' (Daniel).

- » Small and large parks in (semi) residential areas were popular resting places and featured in forty-six percent of missing journeys.
- » Calm natural environments, such as cliffs, beaches and seashores were identified as popular resting places for adults to contemplate their situation and take time out from physically moving.
- » Twenty-two percent of missing adults' journeys utilised local hotels and bed and breakfasts for places to sleep and hide. Cognisant that police check these, adults quite often checked in under a false name and paid in cash to avoid detection.
- » Although predominantly members of 'homed communities', thirty-four percent of missing adults' journeys utilised the environment for rough sleeping and in the urban

and commercial environment: derelict buildings, sheds, squats, underpasses, and transport hubs.

- » The lowest emotional and physical point of their journey was identified as sleeping rough.
- » To avoid rough sleeping adults engaged with risks and stayed with strangers.

Risks

'I did just get on a train and not pay for it. I just jumped on and luckily no ticket inspector came on and checked me' (Daniel).

- » Adults visit a range of places in relation to perceptions of risk and safety and often interacted with others in the process.
- » Despite a recognised possibility of being caught on CCTV, that featured early in journeys, as time passed some adults used public transport.
- » To reduce the fear related to detection 'safe spaces', locations in both the natural and built environments were identified and these include hospitals, pubs, restaurants and cafes and churches.
- » A safe place is not equated with a quiet place.

Emotions in missingness

'In one way, I felt really happy because I thought I'm doing this. I'm soon going to be in Norfolk, but I was also really nervous the

whole time that I was going to get stopped by the police' (Agnes).

- » Journeys are complex and nuanced emotional events and adults reported feeling a range of emotions throughout.
- » Emotions at the start of the missing journey were for the most part positive, yet as journeys continue feelings of isolation, guilt, shame and embarrassment develop and these continued to circulate after the missing person returned or reconnection had been made.

Communication

'I kept turning it on to see if he'd rang and then turning it straight back off again. I think [my daughter] had text me and I didn't want to look at their stuff' (Trish).

- » Missing journeys do not occur in isolation and feature a range of different opportunities and moments for communication.
- » Leaving a mobile phone behind was deliberate for the majority of adults who perceived this reduced their chance of being contacted or tracked and allowed a sense of freedom on their journey.
- » Journeys did not remain contact-free and adults sought out friends for face-to-face contact and for company.
- » People report making contact with friends and employers while

they are still missing, and these key figures do not always report this contact.

Needs

'For weeks I just travelled about and after, every couple of days I'd get myself some fresh clothes, go and get cleaned up and washed and dump my other stuff. I didn't want to be seen, I didn't want to be found' (Max).

- » Adults drew on the built environment and commercial places for resources, rest, food and washing.
- » Fast food outlets, convenience stores, shops, pubs, retail parks and small hotels were popular places for eating and washing, and eateries that had early morning and late night opening hours, such as those at mainline stations were frequented.
- » Adults became savvy at sourcing food. Food sources included soup kitchens, waste bins at retail outlets and meals from friends and strangers.
- » Identifying suitable locations, such as public toilets at which to wash and cafes to get changed, fed into adults decision-making to visit familiar locations.
- » Airports, with their readily available wash facilities and high footfall, provided a location to wash and get changed relatively unnoticed.

Interactions

'After them not being able to help me it was like I wasn't a part of life anymore. I wanted to be dead. I was sat on the bench for hours and even though I was very distraught and unwell people just walked past me anyway' (Jasmine).

- » Interactions via encounters with others were both deliberate and accidental and included contacts with three key agents: i) family, friends and past acquaintances; ii) strangers; and iii) agencies perceived as possible sources of help.
- » Adults turned to agencies for help, such as social workers, addiction clinics, A&E departments, and homeless centres as these offered services that the adults identified as matching their needs.
- » Adults did not seek help from the police or missing persons agencies, as they did not identify with the services offered.
- » In all types of encounters, asking for help was rarely ever about being reported as missing and instead related to the risks they felt in relation to their own emotional and physical needs.

Decisions

'I felt I needed to see someone and she's my closest friend and I didn't want to go home. I guess by that time I was hiding or missing,

hiding is a better word, but I needed to see someone because I was such a wreck. She's the person I trust most in the world. And so I went to see her. So that was what then changed it' (John).

- » All the interviewees returned or were traced, and reconnected with their families, with females making decisions to return sooner than males.
- » Decisions over whether and when and how to reconnect were prompted by an aspiration to end the constant motion/emotion of the journey.
- » Pathways to return are not singular, but friends have a key role to play in brokering these pathways.

Role of police

'I didn't know what to expect. I don't know what they do in missing persons, but I wasn't ready to do that. So I ducked down a foot path' (Rachel).

- » Fearfulness and lack of understanding of police procedure and response in missing persons cases acted as a barrier to accessing police help.
- » Ninety-three percent of adults reported police contact and fifty-nine percent of adults reported police intervention when on a missing journey compared to forty-one percent on return.
- » Police intervention varied from a conversation on a mobile phone, to visiting adults in their homes

for a 'safe and well' check, to returning adults to hospital wards.

- » Adults reported the need to talk about their experience with the police but often the opportunity did not occur.
- » Police provided little explanation and neither did they invite questions which meant for many their missingness remained a mystery to them and led to long lasting feelings of unhappiness and prolonged trauma.
- » Feelings of shock, panic, embarrassment and confusion arise when adults realise they are labelled as a 'missing person' by police, a label with which they do not identify.
- » Having the police play a role in the adults' journeys signified 'wrong doing' and being seen in the company of the police represented a form of criminalisation in the eyes of the adults.
- » Sensitive and empathetic policing is well valued by the adults interviewed.
- » Police handling of the return is critical to feelings of guilt and shame in the missing person, and may be important for continuing mental health or repeat missing events and future police contact.

Returning

'That's the hardest thing, coming home again. Going away is easy' (Caitlin).

- » All adults in this study returned or were traced, but the process

of actual physical return varied and was provoked by police interactions, 'running out of steam', a shift in emotions, a need to re-engage in regular routines, being encouraged by friends to contact loved ones or receiving communications from family members.

- » Twenty-nine percent of adults lived alone when reported as missing and return home initially was to an empty house and an unsupported environment.
- » As interviewees returned and resumed contact with their networks they experienced apprehension at returning, and anger and confusion about being labelled as a missing person.
- » Initial relief to be back among the familiar was pronounced, but as adults embedded back into everyday life these feelings were replaced by those of failure.
- » Adults struggled to come to terms with their return and the pressures that still remained.
- » The end of a missing journey for adults reported as missing does not happen at the point of location or return, rather their journey continues well beyond this point. Adults emphasised the importance of understanding in the process of reconnection and the need to talk not always at the time but for months and years after the event is an important aid to recovery.

What next?

'You don't ever really want the conversation but if you avoid that conversation then you're just going to do it again. You have got to talk about it and even if it's not with your family or to whoever has reported you missing, talk to someone else' (Rhona).

- » Crisis mobilities have a profound impact on the person and their relationships and some people, although returned, are at risk of repeat missing episodes.
- » There is a general lack of support that adults reported as missing receive to assist reconnection or return home.
- » Returning is a difficult and confusing emotional event, and with which no one has many resources available to tackle properly.

Missingness and identity

'I suppose it's that old joke, I know where I am. But because I didn't actually think I was missing, I wouldn't class myself as missing. I was surprised' (Megan).

- » Those reported as missing do not self identify with the label 'missing person';
- » Terms such as - 'running away', 'disappearing', 'going absent', 'taking time out' - were more readily identified with.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are orientated towards 'Provision, Prevention, Protection':

1. Consultation with adults reported as missing should be at the heart of policy creation and service development and delivery.
2. A multi-agency response is both desired and needed to meet the needs of the diverse population that go missing.
3. Government should mandate for the sharing of information and partnership working between statutory and voluntary agencies in the area of missing persons.
4. Services that provide both practical and therapeutic support and seek to limit the long lasting effect that going missing can have on the lives of those involved should be implemented.
5. Missing awareness campaigns should be aimed at health agencies – GP's, mental health services, hospitals – to help them become more attuned to the warning signs and to recognise who may be at risk of going missing amongst their client group.
6. Development of further policing protocols to guide response and facilitate formal co-operation with hospitals and mental health units should be implemented.
7. ACPO, the Serious Organised Crime Agency and Police Scotland should encourage police forces at first point of contact to routinely inform returned missing people of the range of support services available to them through the charity Missing People and other local resources.
8. Safe and well checks should be carried out by police or allied workers, such as NGOs, in a sensitive way and be orientated toward the missing person's welfare and well-being. Liaison which takes place one to two weeks after the event may be more effective.
9. The police or other agencies involved in searching should anticipate environmental resourcefulness and ask a range of relevant people for in-depth information about the missing person's geographical preferences and routines both when missing and after return at safe and well checks.
10. More work needs to be done to highlight missing experience as a human right and officers need to know that they often signify a perceived 'lack of rights' to people reported as missing.
11. Initiatives around missing issues should be designed to raise public awareness and develop a platform for talk on missing issues. Cultures of talk need to replace the current stigmatising silence that exists around missing experience.
12. Learning to recognize signs of impending missingness and developing sensitively orientated and evidence informed 'talk don't walk' campaigns would promote prevention.

13. Major transport hubs like railways and airports should carry advertisements aimed at missing people and relay information about where they may find help and digital display boards would be useful here. Supermarkets and food distribution centres might be targeted as likely locations for missing people to gain resources.
14. 'Encounters' with public transport officials and others in the public realm are significant and publicity campaigns could be targeted at such figures, helping them to understand the journeys missing people undertake.
15. Well-publicised information about services that can help missing adults' immediate, as well as longer-term needs is vital.
16. Messages of confidentiality need to be pushed in awareness campaigns so adults know their needs will be met in a safe and confidential way.
17. Families and friends have an important role to play in recovery and prevention, but more guidance is needed for families and kinship networks on how to respond to a loved one when they return.

CHAPTER 1



CONTENT & CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

‘Many thousands of people are reported missing each year, yet little is known about who they are, why they leave and what happens while they are missing. In particular, very little is known about adults who go missing’ (Biehal *et al* 2003: 1). A decade later, the key body of literature on missing adults (Hirschel and Lab 1988; Henderson and Henderson 1998; Biehal *et al* 2003; Tarling and Burrows 2004) remains underdeveloped. This in part may be because the focus of research into ‘missing persons’ – children, youths, men and women – has centred on the first two groups, which constitute the majority of missing cases being made up of abducted young children and young people who run away. This study aims to address the gap in our knowledge and understanding of the ‘experience of missingness’ for adults.

AIMS & METHODS OF THE STUDY

It is not tardiness on the part of the multiple agencies involved with missing persons – police, charities, health and social workers and researchers – that accounts for the gap in our understanding of the experiences of missing adults. Rather, there exists no single dedicated agency where adults who consider going missing, and those that get reported as such, are represented and supported. Adults who are

reported as missing can only access professional assistance from the police or the Missing People charity, neither of which is a dedicated service for support and resource for this group. Further, a culture of silence and a lack of self-identification with the term ‘missing person’, a term usually used by those left behind, means that any ‘group identity’ is effectively non-existent. This research is designed with the support of both charitable and police partnerships, and with reference to the voices of the people concerned, to address the significant gaps in understanding adult experiences of ‘going missing’. The overall intention is to create a new space of enquiry around missing experience, with direct reference to the people who experience its profound effects (and see also Parr *et al*, (forthcoming) ‘Searching for missing people: families and missing experience’).

The aims of the study are:

1. To examine the scope, capabilities and capacities of organisations to track missing adult people (aged 18 or over) over space and through time;
2. To investigate the experiential geographies of missing people;
3. To advance conceptual understandings of geographies of ‘missingness’;
4. To advance policy and operational understandings of ‘missingness’.

This report specifically focuses on aims two and four. For further reports and materials, see www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk.

METHODS & PARTICIPATION

The Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow granted full ethical approval to this study. During the project the participants have been afforded confidentiality, have given informed consent to take part, and have been free to withdraw from the process at any time without having to give a reason.

Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with forty-five adults aged 18 years and over, who were reported missing during 2009 – 2011. Of the forty-five interviewees, twenty-nine were based in the Grampian area of Scotland and sixteen in London. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in a location chosen by the interviewee. Fourteen females and fifteen males were interviewed in Grampian and seven females and eight males in London.

The age profile of the adults reported as missing who participated in the research is one 18 – 21 year old, eighteen 22 – 39 year olds, twenty-four 40 – 59 year olds, one 60 – 79 year old, and one for whom age was unknown. As Table 1.1 Interviewee characteristics shows, within the whole sample twenty seven had been reported as missing only once and eighteen more than once. Twenty-four of the adults had returned or were located within forty-eight hours from the time they were reported as missing, nine were missing for more than seven days. All interviewees resumed contact with their families and kinship networks at the conclusion of their missing episode.

More information on the ethical and methodological aspects of this study is provided in the Technical Appendix to the report (pg 113). All interview data have been anonymised and made confidential as standard. All names within this report and other project materials are pseudonyms.

Semi structured interviews were designed around the following interview topics:

- » Going missing: leaving
- » Possessions/objects
- » Journey making
- » Encounters
- » Transport/tracking
- » Communication
- » Thoughts of 'return'
- » Being found/returning
- » Thresholds/moments
- » Communication
- » Emotions
- » Police interactions and learning

ANALYSIS

Interviews were coded and explored using QSR NVivo8 and analysed according to standard social science principles. See Technical Appendix for further information (pg 113).

REPORT STRUCTURE

This report presents empirical findings from narrative interviews with adults who have been reported as missing and who have returned or been located. These narratives of missing experience challenge popular social perceptions that assume missing people

Table 1.1
Interviewee characteristics

NAME	DURATION	ONCE/ REPEAT	NAME	DURATION	ONCE/ REPEAT	NAME	DURATION	ONCE/ REPEAT
Adam	0 - 16 hrs	Repeat	Innes	16 - 48 hrs	Once	Mark	48 - 7 days	Once
Angela	0 - 16 hrs	Once	Julie	16 - 48 hrs	Once	Max	48 - 7 days	Repeat
Caitlin	0 - 16 hrs	Repeat	Leon	16 - 48 hrs	Repeat	Mayowa	48 - 7 days	Once
Coleen	0 - 16 hrs	Repeat	Lewis	16 - 48 hrs	Repeat	Megan	48 - 7 days	Once
Douglas	0 - 16 hrs	Repeat	Matt	16 - 48 hrs	Repeat	Michaela	48 - 7 days	Once
Jane	0 - 16 hrs	Repeat	Richard	16 - 48 hrs	Once	Rachel	48 - 7 days	Once
John	0 - 16 hrs	Once	Sophie	16 - 48 hrs	Once	Alex	>7 days	Once
Lesley	0 - 16 hrs	Once	Trish	16 - 48 hrs	Once	Andrew	>7 days	Repeat
Nathan	0 - 16 hrs	Once	Wilma	16 - 48 hrs	Repeat	Darren	>7 days	Once
Nigel	0 - 16 hrs	Once	Agnes	48 - 7 days	Repeat	Jasmine	>7 days	Once
Rhianna	0 - 16 hrs	Once	Daniel	48 - 7 days	Repeat	Jim	>7 days	Repeat
Sarah	0 - 16 hrs	Once	Gareth	48 - 7 days	Once	Joshua	>7 days	Once
Amanda	16 - 48 hrs	Repeat	Jack	48 - 7 days	Once	Mathew	>7 days	Once
Eliza	16 - 48 hrs	Once	Letisha	48 - 7 days	Once	Rhona	>7 days	Repeat
Gavin	16 - 48 hrs	Repeat	Malcolm	48 - 7 days	Repeat	Walter	>7 days	Once

The duration for repeat missing episodes relates to the most recent missing experience. The adult interviewed may have been away for other time periods in previous missing events that are not represented in this table, but do inform the adults narratives of experience.

as individuals who meticulously plan their disappearance and reinvent themselves elsewhere. This is not often the case in reality, and we very rarely hear about what this experience is really like, from the inside. What knowledge does exist about missing behaviour and experience (Biehal *et al* 2003; Gibb and Woolnough 2007) does not rely on in-depth interviewing and to our knowledge, this is the first study to have done so. This report (and see also Parr and Stevenson, 2013) thus takes us through an anatomy of missing journeys and helps us understand something about what it feels like to be an adult reported as missing.

The report has the following structure: in chapter one, the context of the research including relevant concepts and spatial dimensions are introduced. Chapter two sets out in detail the anonymised profile and characteristics of the people taking

part in the study, by location, gender, ethnicity, age, employment and mental health. Chapter three 'Experiences & Journeys' is split into fourteen sections driven by the empirical data and questions which occur to people engaged in missing journeys: we cover the circumstances for leaving, where people decide to go, their social encounters including where to hide or stay and with whom to communicate. We highlight the risks as perceived and experienced by missing adults, their emotions – how missing persons feel during their missing episode – and how they perceive their pathways to access help. We also address issues of return and reconnection for missing adults. An outcome of our exploration of the geographies of missing people is to try to provide practical insights for those with responsibility for and to missing adults. Finally, chapter four provides a summary and sets out recommendations for police, policy makers and NGO's.

CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH



ADULTS REPORTED AS MISSING: AN OVERVIEW

In spite of their absence from the everyday, missing people have a presence and an impact in our lives. In terms of the overall scale of the problem, country level estimates of the numbers of missing persons are largely absent (for exception see James *et al* 2008). UK estimates of police recorded cases suggest that figures are high (NPIA 2011). It is estimated that 327,000 missing persons incidents that include children, youths and adults of all ages are recorded by police in the UK each year. This has been estimated to equate to 216,000 missing individuals in a year as some individuals are reported missing on more than one occasion and the number of recorded missing incidents does not directly equate to the number of individuals. Around 288,000 missing person incidents occur in England and Wales and around 39,000 in Scotland (NPIA 2011). A person in the UK is recorded missing by the police approximately every two minutes (NPIA 2011). Despite this, in the case of missing adults very little is known about, *Who they are, What led to their disappearance? Where did the person go? What happens when and if a missing person returns?*

This report focuses on UK adult missing experiences as articulated by 'returned' missing people themselves and includes the voices of those who go missing in a wide variety of circumstances, from persons who intentionally go missing to those who unintentionally become reported as such.

MISSING PEOPLE RESEARCH

Gaining access to the voices of missing persons who have at some point absented themselves from their everyday lives gives rise to very specific research challenges, not least of which is recruitment to studies. The research literature relating to missing adults is skeletal, and in the main is based on secondary data such as the analysis of databases on missing persons (Gibb and Woolnough 2007) and small scale postal survey of traced missing people (Biehal *et al* 2003). Police force data on missing persons is fragmented and does not clearly distinguish between the activities of young persons and adults who are missing, though this issue is beginning to be addressed by the UK Missing Persons Bureau (UKMPB).

This is the first study to directly report the voices of returned missing adults

themselves derived through qualitative face-to-face interviews. It provides profiles of adults who are reported as missing and explores their personal geographies by placing an emphasis on the anatomy of missing journeys to illustrate the social and spatial terrain of missingness. One outcome of our exploration of the geographies of missing people is to provide practical insights for those with responsibility for and to missing adults. We conclude with recommendations for police, policy makers and NGO's. For other materials, including educational resources, reports and missing stories of experience related to the 'Geographies of Missing People' research project visit www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk.

DEFINING GOING MISSING

What does it mean to be 'missing' or a 'missing person' in the case of adults in non-suspicious circumstances? Despite a greater public awareness and media profiles of adults reported as missing, defining what it is to be missing is still unclear within and between agencies and those reported as missing. Missingness may be attributed, someone may be reported or noticed as missing, but not experience their own missingness or absence. Missing is immediately a problematic term, then, and one used mostly by 'the left behind' (Biehal *et al* 2003). Yet, to place the power of the definition in the hands of those left behind may render the adult missing person labelled as a 'victim' seen to

possess little autonomy or ability to make an active 'choice' (Biehal and Wade 2000).

A definition by the UK social worker Malcolm Payne (1995) is available: 'A social situation in which a person is absent from their accustomed network of social and personal relationships to the extent that people within that network define the absence as interfering with the performance by that person of expected social responsibilities, leading to a situation in which members of the network feel obliged to search for the missing person and may institute official procedures to identify the person as missing' (Payne 1995: 335). This definition suggests missing is an 'active category' whereby those left behind seek an explanation through the employment of active search. Thus missing is defined as a 'situation' rather than a state-of-being or an act or a person (Payne 1995).

There are technical definitions, such as those from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO): 'Anyone whose whereabouts is unknown whatever the circumstances of disappearance. They will be considered missing until located and their wellbeing or otherwise established' (ACPO 2005: 8). This definition acknowledges that people go missing in a range of circumstances, but also that they will continue to be considered missing until located in time and place. Yet such a definition is one generated by located social or kinship networks and government agencies. More recently, greater recognition of the complexity of missing situations has seen a

change brought to the definition. In 2013, a new definition came into effect that includes an absent category (ACPO 2013: 5):

Missing: – ‘Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.’

Absent: – ‘A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be.’

The updated definition both acknowledges that people go missing or go absent in a range of circumstances and acts to assert that the immediate (police) response to missing persons is proportionate and risk-based. The report will reference the act of ‘going missing’ in discussion of empirical materials, but we understand this as a problematic term as indicated above.

THE SCALE OF MISSINGNESS IN THE UK

Missing incidents differ in terms of duration and outcome. Up to eighty percent return within twenty-four hours with most missing people either returning to the place they left or being found alive. Around 2000 missing people remain absent a year after going missing and on average twenty people a week are found dead after being reported missing (NPIA 2011; Tarling and Burrows 2004). In

the UK, roughly equal numbers of males and females go missing, but almost two-thirds of all reports relate to children (under 18s) with the most frequently reported missing age group being 15 – 17 year olds (NPIA 2011). Adult missing person incidents amount to approximately thirty-six percent of total annual cases and remain under-researched.

DRIVERS FOR MISSING

Researchers have long recognised there is an ‘exceedingly complex web of behaviours and responses that surround the phenomenon of missing persons’ (James *et al*/2008: 2). Building on Payne’s earlier work (1995), Biehal *et al* (2003: 2), developed the ‘missing continuum’ to account for different drivers for missing situations. By consulting returned missing adults via a telephone survey, the results led to the development of a ‘missing continuum’ from intentional to unintentional, ranging from ‘decided’, through ‘drifted’, and ‘unintentional absence’ to ‘forced’. The continuum takes account of the different drivers for missing situations and shows how important it is to consult missing people themselves to better understand missing situations. The complexity is further demonstrated through a more recent overview of possible reasons for disappearance:

‘While it is not a crime to go missing, there may be factors relating to the criminal justice system, either underpinning the

motives of the missing person, or relating to the outcome of the missing person investigation. On the other hand, the explanation may be totally removed from any criminal dimension and could include social problems associated with mental health issues, alcohol use, child psychological abuse, child neglect or parental rejection of a child. It could be a combination of both criminal activities and social problems, for instance domestic violence, child sexual abuse, child physical abuse or illicit drug use. ... The incident may relate to child abduction by an estranged parent or stranger. It could involve an older person with Alzheimer's disease or dementia. It may be a homicide or a suicide or be the result of an accident ... The list is seemingly endless.' (James et al 2008: 2)

This typology of possible 'causes' points to a complex set of possible reasons for missing situations, yet, even with the focus on why a person goes missing what still remains unclear is a deeper exploration of where they go when reported as missing and how they make decisions in relation to their geographies.

MAPPING MISSING PEOPLE & PROFILES

While the experiences of adults reported as missing are under-researched, since 2010 the UK Missing Persons Bureau (UKMPB) have produced maps of missing incidences (all ages) via quarterly police data returns. It is widely recognised that data returns are partial, but even so, these maps highlight the national distribution of missing incidences recorded in each police force area (see NPIA 2011 for maps of missing person incidences: 12-13). The mapping of missing incidences has been developed to inform police, local and non-governmental agencies decision-making and support families (NPIA 2011). Similarly, the UK charity Missing People provide 'real-time' information of people reported as missing held on their database via a clickable map of the UK regions. The map allows the public to see who is missing from where, provides information on the number of annual helpline calls received from each region and invites the public to 'join the search'. This provides a useful, but partial, view as it only includes those known to the charity and reported via family and kinship networks.

MISSING BEHAVIOR & SPATIAL PROFILES

In the UK the Police have a statutory duty to risk assess and respond to all

cases of persons reported missing to them (ACPO 2013). Given the high volume of missing incidents this is a particularly demanding operational challenge compounded by the potential for a case to result in a fatal outcome (Gibb and Woolnough 2007; ACPO 2010). Risk assessment is a critical element of ensuring an appropriate police response (Newiss 1999; Hedges 2002; ACPOS 2013) and while some research has attempted to look at the association between missing and fatal outcomes (Newiss 2006) or missing and homicide (Newiss 2004), research has yet to provide sufficient basis for the development of a robust evidence-based risk assessment and response methodology, especially in relation to adult missing persons. There is, however, an increasing amount of research in the area of lost person behaviour, although this usually relates to the development of search strategies rather than risk assessment *per se*. Search and rescue data relates predominantly to those missing in rural environments and categorizations of lost person behaviours have been developed that profile the likely distances people travel from the point they were last seen or went missing from (Syrotuck 1975, 1976; Hill 1991, 1999; Twardy *et al* 2006; Perkins *et al* 2011). This type of profiling work has led to the development of a number of guides to aid search planning and management (e.g., Koester 2008). Yet, not all missing persons are lost, and not all are in very rural environments. So while this data has proven useful in more extreme or particularly rural locations, its application to the full range of more urban or 'everyday'

missing persons, particularly those encountered by the police, has limitations.

ACPO guidance (2006) advises police to use 'scenario based searching' for missing people. This requires police officers to consider the reasons behind a disappearance, the motivation and ability of the missing person, and other factors that may hinder or assist a discovery when developing a search strategy. Related to such search planning, Grampian Police developed the first ever spatial profiles of missing persons specifically to aid police investigations (ACPO 2006; Gibb and Woolnough 2007). Spatial behaviour profiles work to locate types of missing people in likely geographic scenarios, based on police data about usual distance travelled in time, for gender, age, risk and other factors (like potential suicide risk, or particular diagnosis like schizophrenia or access to a car; see also Shalev *et al* 2009). Gibb and Woolnough (2007) have produced useable typologies issued across the UK to a wide variety of search-and-rescue agents and agencies. This material constitutes the only specifically spatial guidance to locate missing people that exists, although there are different software packages available for spatial interpretation and workups (see also search-and-rescue guidance: Thomas and Hulme 1997; Perkins *et al* 2003, 2004; Koester 2008). While the development of quantitative spatial profiling appears to have helped the police improve their understanding and response to missing person investigations, there are important gaps in our knowledge

of missing experiences as articulated by missing adults themselves.

There are acknowledged limitations to any models that predict behaviour and risk and it is well understood that the police, although informed by an evidence based approach, will always be required to exercise a good deal of professional judgement in missing person cases (Tarling and Burrows 2004; ACPO 2010). Indeed officer guidelines have been developed to reflect this and ensure all circumstances surrounding the case are considered. Yet, limited attempts have been made to understand 'going missing' as a spatial journey, rich with social, material and emotional dimensions and these knowledges could act as important checks and balances to behavioural models and professional judgement. This deficit informs the production of this report and its associated resources.

POLICY

Government funded and police-driven research has focused on the risks associated with missing vulnerable people (Newiss 2006), as well as analysing the development of personal and spatial profiling of 'typical' missing people (Newiss 2005; Gibb and Woolnough 2005). This work, along with political pressures, resulted in ACPO, in conjunction with the College of Policing, publishing operational guidance for all police forces in relation to the management, recording and investigation of missing persons (ACPO 2010; 2013) as well

as guidance on how to physically search for missing persons (ACPO 2006). This latter guidance is most often used by Police Search Advisors who are specialist police officers trained in many aspects of search including missing persons. Increasing momentum within England and Wales in relation to missing person policy and practice resulted in the Home Office (2011) recently publishing the first official Government strategy 'Missing children and adults: a cross government strategy', which focuses attention on vulnerable people who go missing within England and Wales, and sets out a framework for collective action through 'prevention, protection, provision'. Strategies for support delivered through NGO's are signposted and suggestions made for local agencies, such as the police linking families to support agencies. Yet, whilst the ACPO guidance and this strategy represent important policy development and significant efforts to address the challenge of missing persons, there is little reference to any voices of adults who have been reported as missing or reference to how their needs can be fully met.

THE STUDY

For the purposes of this study adults reported as missing were selected based on their age (18 years and over), police force areas and time away. Working with two police force databases, Police Scotland and The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) potential interviewees were identified.

In each force a designated point of contact posted a standardised letter, information sheet and consent form to a relevant sample of returned missing persons within a pre-defined period, inviting them to participate in a research interview. We proactively sampled for post-fourteen day cases to ensure that the project had the opportunity to potentially interview longer-term missing persons. Missing persons under 18 years of age, those with dementia, or missing in disasters or forced circumstances like abduction were excluded from the research. Not all of the sample self identified with the ACPO (2013) definition given above of a missing person, but did recognize themselves as 'absent'. However, the study has not sought to refine these definitions of missing (ACPO 2013; Payne 1995) nor has it sought to sample adults reported as missing on the basis of particular 'types' of missing experience. Our concerns are with the journeys undertaken whilst being reported as missing, and the exploration of the social and spatial dimensions of adult missing journeys in general.

SUMMARY

Data on missing adults is sparse and sketchy. The emphasis on understanding missing phenomena has concentrated on young runaways, which constitute the majority of the 327,000 annual reported missing incidents. In this report our attention turns to adults aged 18 years and over which constitute thirty-six percent of all missing incidents. The drivers for adults going missing are complex and research has so far focused on why adults go missing from their everyday lives. As geographers we aim to explore the anatomy of missing journeys to illustrate the social and spatial experience of adults reported as missing by looking at how adults use and perceive the environments they move through during these 'crisis mobilities' (Parr and Fyfe 2012: 9).

CHAPTER 2



ADULTS REPORTED AS MISSING: PROFILES & CHARACTERISTICS

INTRODUCTION

The sample of adults interviewed in this research was reported to the police as missing between 2009 – 2011. The sample is drawn from two police forces computerised missing person recording and management systems (Police Scotland and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)) and for that reason persons not recorded on these systems were excluded. This chapter sets out the characteristics of the sample by location, gender, ethnicity, age, employment and mental health.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PERSONS REPORTED AS MISSING HELD ON POLICE SCOTLAND (GRAMPIAN REGION) AND METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE (MPS) DATABASES

The total scale of missing incidence for the UK as a whole, Police Scotland and the MPS is illustrated in Table 2.1, which shows that both police forces respond to above national average missing person incidences.

In the two year period 2009 and 2010, Police Scotland in the Grampian region recorded 1166 adults as missing of which eighty-six percent were reported missing once and the remaining fourteen percent were reported missing more than twice. Police Scotland data shows that men were twice as likely to be reported as missing than women. In terms of age, thirty-five percent of both males and females were aged between 18 – 30 years old.

Across the thirty-two MPS boroughs, 11020 adults were reported missing in 2011. The sample was drawn from all adults reported as missing to the London boroughs of Islington and Hammersmith and Fulham and across all MPS boroughs for post-fourteen day missing persons (see technical appendix for further details: 113). In the one-year period 2011, Islington recorded 609 incidents of missing person of which 335 relate to males and 254 to females. For Hammersmith and Fulham 529 incidents of missing person were recorded for the same period and 271 relate to males and 258 to females. Similar to the missing profile in the Grampian region of Scotland, across the two boroughs and longer term missing episodes there are more incidences of males than females reported as missing.

Table 2.1
Number of incidence reported missing in Police Scotland and MPS 2010/2011

POLICE FORCE	POPULATION	NUMBER OF MISSING INCIDENCES	INCIDENCE PER 1,000 POPULATION
Police Scotland	5,221,600	39,197	7.5
MPS	7,813,500	49,292	6.3
UK (excluding. N. Ireland)	60,462,075	326,764	5.1

Source: based on NPfA 2011 report

Unlike adolescences' missing episodes, missing episodes for adults decrease with age and therefore both the Grampian region for Police Scotland and MPS missing persons samples in relation to age is in line with the overall national picture (NPIA 2011).

The 'Geographies of Missing People' research project is an attempt to enable adults reported as missing to these police forces to provide their own accounts of their experiences of being reported as missing. These rich accounts provide insights into the drivers for missingness, *where* adults go when reported as missing and *how* they make decisions in relation to their geographies. An outline of the characteristics of the sample reveals some broad consistencies in relation to who gets reported as missing, by location, gender, ethnicity, age, employment and mental health. While we do not claim this is generalisable as our sample is statistically small, the rich qualitative data and the breakdown of the numbers into the above categories combine to highlight points of interest within the sample (see technical appendix for further details, especially in relation to sample generation and characteristics: 113).

LOCATION

Of the forty-five adults interviewed for this study sixty-four percent lived in Scotland and thirty-six percent lived in London. Within the sample, sixty-two percent lived in urban locations

and thirty-eight percent in rural. Higher numbers for those living in urban locations will have been skewed by the London portion of the sample as participants were recruited from two inner London boroughs.

GENDER

In the UK, fifty-one percent of all missing people are male and forty-nine percent female, but adult males are more likely to be reported as missing than adult females (NPIA 2011). Our sample population mirrored this finding. Of those who were invited to participate in this study (n=2440), 1551 were male and 898 were females. However, the interview sample (n=45) shows that three-fifths (56%) were male and two-fifths (44%) female of which roughly equal numbers of males and females in both London and Grampian were interviewed.

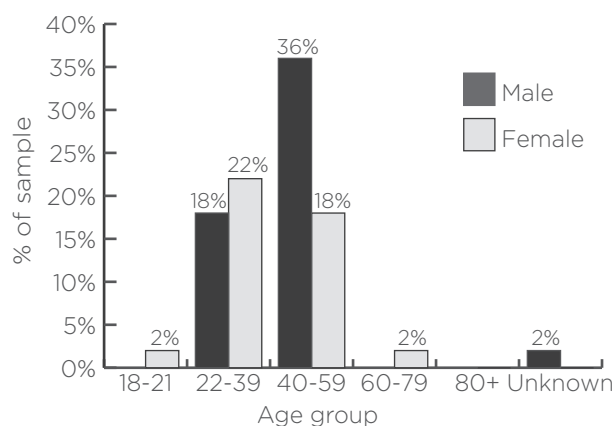
AGE

Nationally an estimated 216,000 individuals were reported missing to UK police forces in the year 2010-11. One-third (36%) of incidents relate to missing adults aged over 18 years (NPIA 2011: 6).

A breakdown of our sample by age (n=45) showed that ninety-three percent of the sample that participated in an interview were aged 22 - 59 years of which forty

percent were aged 22 – 39 years old and fifty-three percent 40 – 59 years. Taken together the characteristics of age and gender indicate that more females aged 22 – 39 years old and more males aged 40 – 59 years old participated in interviews. The age and gender profile of interviewees follows previous research findings that show that those reported as missing decreases with age and that older aged men are more likely to be reported missing than women (Biehal *et al* 2003).

Graph 2.1
Interviewed sample by age and gender (n=45)

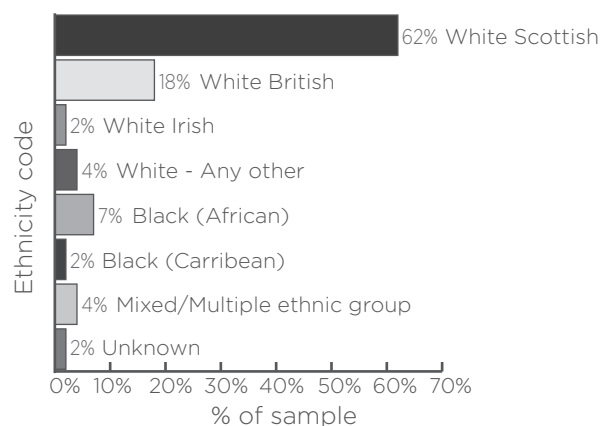


ETHNICITY

There has yet to be any systematic data collection and study of missing people and ethnicity, although police returns to the UKMPB now include this information. Ethnicity has been categorised using 2011 Office for National Statistics ethnic group codes (www.ons.gov.uk). The sample (n=45) shows the majority of adults reported as missing that took part in an interview were coded as white

Scottish followed by white British (see Graph 2.2). The data indicates that more white people were interviewed in Scotland compared to London and the analysis is in line with the ethnicity profile of Scotland as a whole.

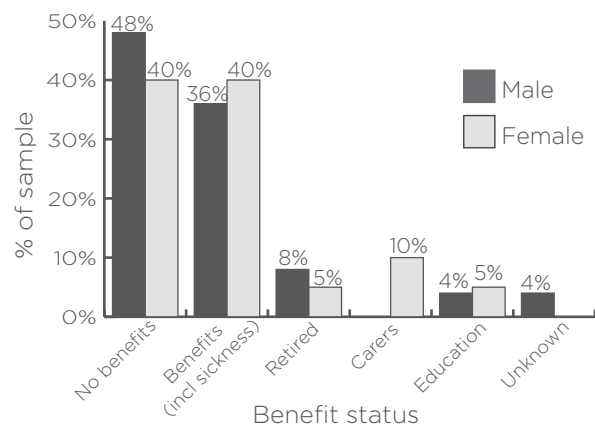
Graph 2.2
Interviewed sample by ethnicity (n=45)



EMPLOYMENT STATUS

In 2004 a study found that unemployment was high amongst missing people, with sixty percent of those aged between 20 and 60 years being out of work when they were reported as missing (Tarling and Burrows 2004:19). Graph 2.3 shows that almost half (44%) of those interviewed were employed and half-unemployed with no difference between males and females. Almost half (49%) of the sample population were out of work or had been unable to work for health reasons prior to going missing and approximately forty percent of adults didn't claim benefits and forty percent did.

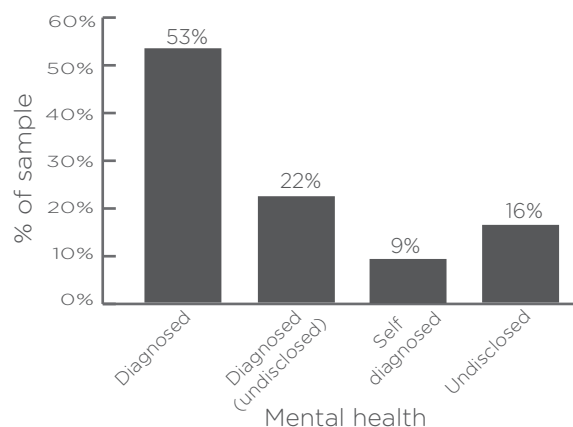
Graph 2.3
Interviewed sample by benefit status and gender (n=45)



MENTAL HEALTH

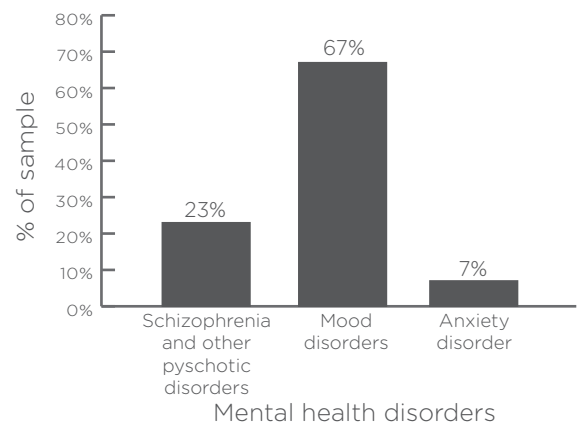
Previous research suggests that many people who get reported as missing suffer poor health or have a disability (Biehal *et al* 2003) and that this may be as high as eighty percent (Gibb and Woolnough 2007). In line with these, seven-tenths of the interviewees (76%) reported having mental health problems (both diagnosed and undiagnosed). This rises to eighty-five percent when mental health issues of self-diagnosis are included (see Graph 2.4).

Graph 2.4
Interviewed sample by mental health (n=45)



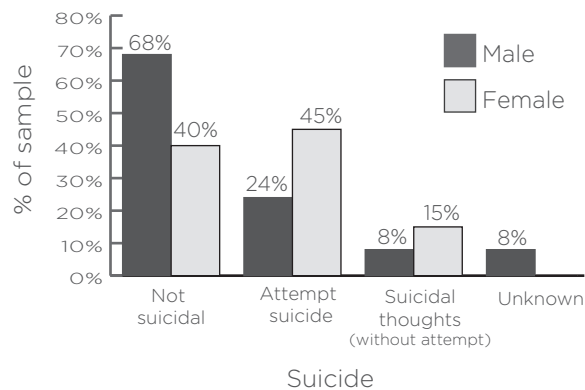
Of the interviewees who disclosed their mental health status (n=38), just under seven-tenths (67%) reported mood disorders (including bipolar and depression) and just over one-fifth (23%) reported schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders (see Graph 2.5).

Graph 2.5
Interviewed sample by mental health disorders (n=38)



In total fifty-six percent of adults reported no thoughts of committing suicide whilst being reported as missing, but forty-two percent did report that they had suicidal thoughts with thirty-three percent attempting suicide whilst reported as missing. Graph 2.6 shows that men reported less suicidal thoughts than women and almost twice as many women attempted suicide whilst reported as missing.

Graph 2.6
Interviewed sample by suicide intention and gender (n=45)



RESIDENCE PRIOR TO BEING REPORTED MISSING

At the start of a missing episode thirteen percent of the sample lived with a parent, a further thirteen percent lived with a partner, but a third (33%) defined themselves as 'living with others' (including children, other relatives, and friends). The next significant group were those living alone and this twenty-nine percent were made up of twenty percent men and nine percent women.

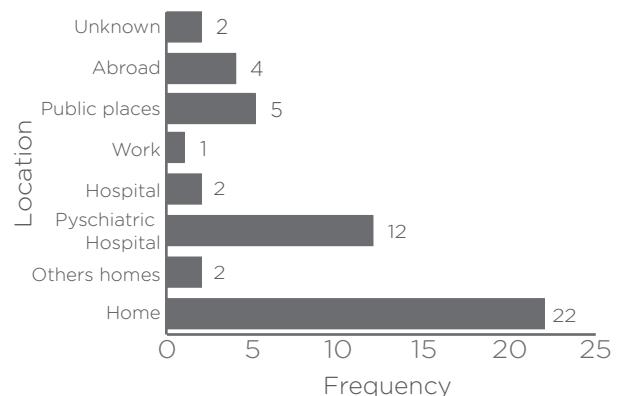
Although interviewees reported their main residence as their home address at the time of being reported missing, twelve incidents of going missing from mental health institutions were reported. Furthermore, twenty-seven percent of the sample considered home as a place to 'visit' as part of their missing journey. Both home address and the actual residence from where adults go missing is therefore an important geographical feature with residence being both a

metaphorical and material space of adult missing journeys.

WHERE PERSONS REPORTED AS MISSING LEAVE FROM

As Tarling and Burrows (2004) and Shalev *et al* (2009) have found, persons reported as missing go from a range of locations. The range of locations for the adults in this study are shown on Graph 2.7. As can be seen, the most frequently reported location was their home address, followed by psychiatric hospitals. The least common location was the work place. NPIA (2011) data indicates that in half of all missing incidents people go missing from home and our sample concurs with this.

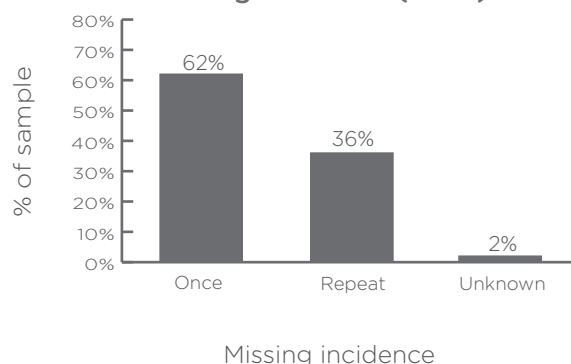
Graph 2.7
Frequency of location interviewed adults went missing from (n=45)



THE NUMBER OF TIMES A PERSON HAS BEEN REPORTED AS MISSING

The number of missing incidents does not directly equate to the total number of individuals reported missing during any one year, as some people are reported missing more than once. As shown on Graph 2.8 three-fifths (62%) of adults interviewed had been reported as missing on one occasion, but almost two-fifths (36%) had been reported missing on more than one occasion. There is minimal difference in our sample between males and females who are reported as missing once or more than once. This contrasts with MPS and Police Scotland, where the majority (63%) of adults were reported missing once to the MPS compared with fifty-five percent of adults reported to Police Scotland in the Grampian region.

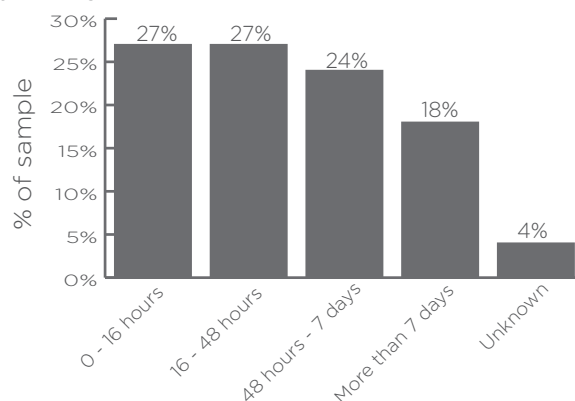
Graph 2.8
Number of missing incidence (n=45)



HOW LONG ARE PEOPLE REPORTED AS MISSING AWAY FOR?

Information on the length of time adults were reported as missing was recorded. This is based upon interviewees' own perceptions rather than police reports. Our data shows that the majority (54%) of missing people return or are located within forty-eight hours with twenty-four percent missing between forty-eight hours and seven days (see Graph 2.9). This partial picture is consistent with previous research which has found that the majority (91%) of all reported missing persons incidents are resolved quickly (Tarling and Burrows 2004; NPIA 2011).

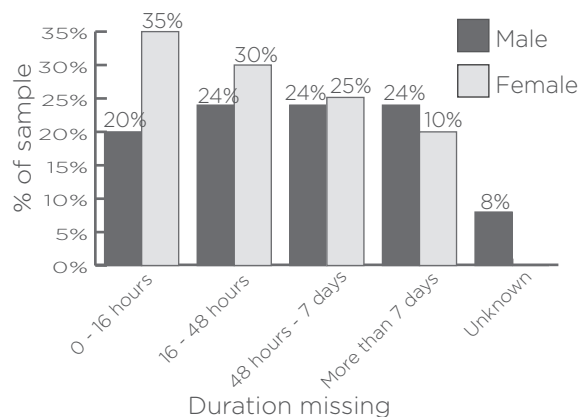
Graph 2.9
Interviewed sample by duration of missing journey (n=45)



An analysis of our sample by duration and gender indicates that sixty-five percent of women return or are located within forty-eight hours, but more males (24%) remain outstanding for longer than a week (see Graph 2.10). Within the Grampian region, most (76%) individuals returned or

were traced within forty-eight hours. This contrasts with those interviewed from the MPS where most (75%) were missing for over seven days.

Graph 2.10
Interviewed sample by journey duration and gender (n=45)



SUMMARY

The key characteristics of adults as derived from qualitative interviews (n=45) are as follows: there is a 60:40 urban-rural split, approximately 50:50 male and female, all were over 18 years old with over ninety percent of the sample aged between 22 and 59 years and were almost exclusively white (Scottish, British). The employment status of the sample was more or less an equal split between employed and unemployed. A high proportion of the sample reported mental health issues (both diagnosed and undiagnosed) and thirty-three percent attempted suicide whilst reported as missing. Almost a third of the adults were living alone prior to being reported as missing. All of the adults had returned from a reported missing episode with females returning sooner than males. Fifty-three percent of the sample returned or were located within forty-eight hours, but twenty percent continued to be reported missing for longer than seven days.

CHAPTER 3



EXPERIENCES & JOURNEYS



LEAVING:

How can I cope with this?

The circumstances that lead to adults being reported as missing are complex and whilst some people might make a conscious decision to leave, the situations that people go absent from are not entirely of their own making. The main drivers for adults going missing are well documented and include mental health crisis, drug and alcohol issues, relationship breakdowns, domestic abuse, debt and so on (James *et al* 2008) and our interview data supports this:

'Due to my depression because we had lost five kids, me and my wife. I think it's down to that why I keep going missing 'cause sometimes, I just can't handle it, I need to get away' (Matt²).

'A bad encounter with a lady friend and it really broke my heart. I was devastated and it was affecting my work and I wasn't turning up and I was signed off with depression' (Richard).

'There was a lot of issues in the past from my childhood to my parents to moving so far away

from my kids. To the point where I actually got raped and it was just too much thoughts in my head and I couldn't handle it and I went' (Michaela).

In some instances, both males and females, reported feeling trapped within both their social situation and their physical location. The need to leave, then, was often expressed as a response to a period or a situation where the person no longer felt able to cope:

'In a relationship, well like with females rejecting me. And that got on top of me along with being bullied and it got to the point where I just couldn't cope' (Gavin).

'I actually think of myself as a strong person but the reality of it is that I can be fragile. Yes, its responsibility ... and I think everybody at some point in their life can't cope with that much responsibility' (Rachel).

Unable to share feelings or locate effective forms of support, going absent appeared for the majority of adults to be a preferable way to create

² All interviewees' names that feature in this report and other project materials are pseudonyms. For further details, see Table 1.1 Interviewee characteristics.

time and space to think:

‘It was just like I’ve had enough, I’ve had enough of me handing myself out to everybody and nobody being there for me and that and so it was just like I can’t cope with this, I need time and space for myself’ (Trish).

Deciding to leave both created a moment of calm and clarity, as well as short term mental and physical relief as summed up by Jack, a 27 year old who said: *‘It was instant relief from the hassle and the stress and the nerves’*. Indeed, the thought of being able to ‘start a-fresh’ was seen as liberating and many adults described how the actual act of leaving bought a sense of freedom: *‘I felt free when I left. As soon as I walked out the door I felt free’* (Rhianna). These feelings are in part linked to control and going absent for the majority of interviewees was: *‘about getting control back again’* (Lesley). Initial feelings of release, freedom and control, however, were often revised as adults continued their missing journeys.

Maybe I could just leave?

A distinction can be drawn between considering going absent as a possible alternative to the current situation but not acting upon it and physically leaving. Indeed, the thought of leaving and physically going do not always occur simultaneously and some adults described how: *‘always in the back of my mind I wanted away but to actually*

go and physically do it was probably a two or three hour decision’ (Caitlin).

Although the level of consideration given over to whether to go absent varied amongst the adults (see Table 3.1), for the majority (53%) the decision to physically leave was instantaneous:

‘There was no overall plan or anything, it was only just an instant, I’m getting out of here now and that’s what I’m going to do and that’s what I did’ (Andrew).

Table 3.1
Planning ‘windows’ before the act of leaving.

Planning	% of adults (n=58)	
	Male	Female
Days before	5%	7%
Night before	7%	16%
Moments before	29%	24%
Mention plan to others	3%	7%

Column does not total 100% as people planned to go missing more than once.

In interview data we find twenty-three percent had planned to leave the night before, but thirteen percent had made plans several days in advance. Planning strategies varied from withdrawing money from bank accounts in dribs and drabs to avoid detection from a spouse, reserving hotel rooms in advance to arranging to meet friends for companionship and/or shelter.

Females were more likely to plan in advance to go absent and a minority (7%) of women indicated their intentions to others before or at the point of leaving. Rachel said: *‘I just didn’t really cope very well. I sent an angry text to everybody and left*

the building and just disappeared.' Surprisingly, planning to leave days in advance is not associated with being missing for longer periods.

Adults frequently reported going missing from mental health institutions, which involved varied degrees of planning. Planning to escape the ward was often driven by a feeling of: *'I wasn't coping with what was going on in my head at all and all I wanted was out'* (Amanda). The need to engage in routine activities drove planning decisions as Douglas, a male who was reported missing more than once commented: *'just down to the shops, even to the Tesco's. Just to have a wander around to get out, have a bit of fresh air. It's such a stifling place. It's just nice to get out and go to the library and go on the computers.'*

Plans focused on both getting out the 'locked door' of the ward, as well as possible locations to go to once on the outside. We found adults in mental health institutions planned to use their time out from wards to abscond, as described by Coleen: *'I had been given five minutes off the ward in the hospital grounds and just walked out.'* To buy time and not raise the alarm, adults described plans that involved not taking coats when going outside for time out or leaving a ward with minimal possessions:

'I was only allowed half an hour time out from the ward. So I thought if I went down in my slippers, if I bugged off they wouldn't know I was gone and half an hour would give me a good start' (Adam).

For adults on a Section, opportunities to abscond were not readily available. In these instances interviewees disclosed different tactics for leaving wards. One man described his leaving as opportunistic: *'one minute I am smoking a cigarette and the next I've just gone bang, bang over the fence'* (Max). Another woman explained how: *'I seen the receptionist on, and I just smiled at her really nicely, and she opened the doors and I just thought right now just keep walking'* (Rhianna). For others, the need to escape and a distinct plan of action drove their determination to leave the ward:

'I had got dressed and I looked out the door and all I felt inside was this real adrenaline rush that I was absolutely focused on where I was going to go. I was going to go to that fire exit, nothing was going to stop me from getting there' (Amanda).

Indications that a person might have intentions to go missing were present in the interview data and consisted of verbal and behavioural clues such as three people had not turned up for work and did not call in sick, which was unusual for them. Four people had been to see their GP showing signs of physical and emotional stresses before going missing and one female reported that *'one of my trigger factors is I cut all my hair off and I put bleach in it. That is one of my signs that I'm due to go'* (Rhona). For those who were suicidal signalling intent to leave was present especially for those in psychiatric institutions.

SUMMARY

Section one shows that there were no particular superseding characteristics such as age and gender or employment status that distinguished adults who are reported missing other than their self-perception of poor mental health. The drivers leading to adults being reported as missing are multifaceted and include historic and current traumatic experiences and strong emotions of being unable to cope, feeling trapped and powerless to talk about or share their feelings. Although unable to talk in this context, interviewees reported that their behaviours indicated their impending absence. A sense of elation at leaving the 'everyday life' that had caused stressful reactions was reported by many, and although a third of interviewees had planned their absence most did not have definite plans for exactly *when* and *where* they were going to go.

LEARNING POINT

Adults sometimes exhibit clear signs that they are intending to go absent and indicate these to services and significant others through verbal and behavioural cues related to stress and depression. Learning to recognize these signs and developing sensitively orientated and evidence informed 'talk don't walk' campaigns would promote prevention.

2

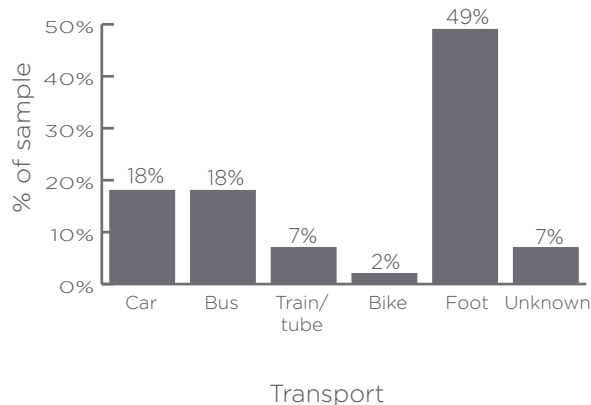
LOCATIONS:

I'm away - where do I go?

'Every move I made was impulsive and I wasn't thinking to more than the next day' (Darren).

Nearly all interviewees reported that their missing journey was not pre-determined in terms of how long it would last or the exact location they would end up, but the first few hours of a journey were spent focused on decisions on where to go and how to travel. As Graph 3.1 shows, adults took a variety of transports options within the first few hours of a journey.

Graph 3.1
Mode of transport used within the first few hours of leaving (n=45)



Although consideration was given to car travel, when a car was used (18%) distances travelled were short and cars were parked soon after first leaving. In these cases adults reported the main reasons for this decision was:

1) they had reached their destination, 2) an awareness that driving in a heightened emotional state was dangerous and 3) *'I didn't want to drive and drink on top of everything else'* (Andrew). Whilst adults might be trying to free themselves from their lives, this indicates that they remain conscious of their own safety and that of others at times of crisis.

As indicated by Graph 3.1, consideration was given to bus travel (18%). For those travelling by bus, *'where to go'* was initially decided for them: *'I obviously I knew I was going somewhere, but I didn't know where, but I walked up to the bus stop and I just thought I'll jump on the first bus that comes along'* (Mathew). Using public transport meant the scheduling of journeys was outside adult control and waiting at bus stops added to the anxiety of being caught:

'I was thinking 'how long will it be before they report me missing?' 'Cause my bus, I left there about half past one and my bus didn't leave till 6 o'clock and I'm not normally out all day so I thought they might think something is up. So I was a bit worried that I was going to get caught before I set

off' (Agnes).

Thus, when faced with the dilemma 'do I catch the bus? or do I walk?' in the initial first hours travel was mainly on foot (49%). Adults reported states of confusion being a high component of the first few hours: *'I left the house and I just started to wander the streets, confused and dazed'* (John).

Although confusion is a commonly reported state-of-mind at this time, walking was seen to bring an *'optimism that there's maybe something good that's going to come of it'* (Leon). In this sense the need to keep moving was not purely pragmatic, but both a bodily and therapeutic response to help deal with the thoughts and emotions that the person is experiencing, as summed up by Amanda:

'It was about 2 o'clock in the morning and I was just walking. I was just wandering the streets, just having this need to keep going forward, but at the same time not having any clue as to where I was going to end up'.

Rather than moving from point A to B in linear ways, journeys were characterised by wandering round in circles or loops or squares. This is not to suggest that people only wander aimlessly as they travel. Quite the contrary, deliberate decisions about their geographies are taken. Decisions relate to a variety of concerns such as: choosing modes of transport; which spatial domains to traverse such as, streets and areas to avoid; when and

where to get off buses; and whether to stay local or travel further afield.

In the first few hours the majority of adults do not realise they have been reported as missing, and so are not aware that anyone is formally looking for them. Regardless, adults still wished to avoid crowds and so took routes to facilitate this: *'I decided to walk up onto the street known as the High Street and got onto there and then I joined some back streets and they were quiet. And I was able to walk along there for a bit and avoid the crowds'* (John).

In contrast, those sensitive to the possibility of being reported as missing expressed an awareness of the ability of formal surveillance technologies to track movements across space and locate them in time through CCTV. Although it did not halt a journey or send a person to ground, decisions around mode of travel and the distance travelled were influenced: *'I kept thinking if I go get on a bus somewhere half the buses now have CCTV, so they'll know where I'm going. So that's why I started walking. No one will know where I'm going, they can't follow me'* (Trish).

Regardless of surveillance technologies, decisions on where to go based on personal geographies were central to all the adults and whilst they take a variety of journeys both short and long, these journeys mainly involve going to familiar or significant areas (Table 3.2), such as places they used to live:

'I passed by our old house, which

I only lived there for a very short period of time so I don't remember very much about it. I kept walking and I found myself by the river again. Directions I chose weren't premeditated it was just a need to keep moving. But I gravitated towards paths that I had been along before' (Leon).

Or an area they work or have friends, for example:

'All around me were places that I had been with people and I knew people pass through, only a few blocks away was my office and I kind of obviously steered clear of that. I was deliberately avoiding going anywhere that I could easily bump into somebody on the street' (Mathew).

Table 3.2
Locations - all journey types

Locations - all journey types	% of adults (n=75)	
	Males	Females
Stays local	15%	15%
Travels further afield	5%	1%
Visits familiar places	23%	23%
Visits unfamiliar places	3%	0%
Visits familiar & unfamiliar	3%	4%
Stays local and goes further afield	4%	5%

Column does not total 100% as people may have visited several places.

Even though interviewees were mobile, Table 3.3 shows the combinations of places visited and for the majority of adults (48%) their journeys involved staying local and visiting familiar

places. Locations were chosen that were: *'far enough away, away from people knowing me, but close enough so that I can feel comfortable enough within my surroundings, and I don't feel like I stand out'* (Max). The adults saw this strategy as a way to reduce the potential of drawing attention through being lost or appearing out of place.

Table 3.3
Location for single journey types

Locations - single journey type	% of adults (n=45)	
	Males	Females
Stays local	0%	0%
Stays local & visits familiar places	24%	22%
Stays local & visits unfamiliar places	4%	0%
Stays local & visits familiar & unfamiliar places	2%	4%
Stays local & visits unfamiliar & travels further afield	0%	2%
Stays local, travels further & visits familiar places	9%	9%
Visits familiar places & travels further afield	9%	4%
Stays local & travels further afield & visits familiar & unfamiliar places	0%	2%
Travels further afield & visits unfamiliar places	4%	0%
Unknown	2%	0%

Column does not total 100% as people may have visited several places.

The need to know where to access local amenities and conveniences also contributed to decisions of where to go in the next few hours:

'I could have gone anywhere, but I mean Dundee and Aberdeen both are uncharted territories for me. I knew the sort of layout of Montrose and I knew where the public loos where' (Andrew).

MISSING, NOT LOST

Going to familiar places and staying local in particular was recognised as a risky strategy as it could lead to being seen. Yet, the risks for some adults was balanced by the recognition that: *'if I had gone somewhere I didn't know it would have been a lot harder to get through the next few days because I wouldn't know where anything was'* (Alex). Knowing streets and being able to navigate areas comfortably was important and to be lost was perceived as a significantly different experience to being missing: *'there is a big difference between disappearing and being lost because when I went missing the idea was that I would know where I was but I got myself into these side streets and didn't have a clue and that was really quite scary'* (Amanda). Adults considered being lost was a risk to their personal safety and this contributed to decisions to retrace routes back to environments that are more familiar: *'so I headed back and found the main road again I felt relief again to know where I was. As long as no one else knew where I was that was okay'* (Wilma).

The need to feel safe on a missing journey was key. While darkness provided cover, it was also a particular element that *'was quite scary because it's amazing how darkness takes all your bearings away'* (Caitlin). Darkness was disorientating and disrupted an adult's sense of personal safety and so where possible the majority of interviewees tried to walk in known lit streets: *'the reason I went straight*

is because it was the most lit area and it was a nice walkway and it was bright lights' (Wilma). Recognised by some as a high-risk strategy because of the potential to be detected, adults chose lit, but least travelled or quieter streets to move along. When this was not possible, they ducked behind hedges and hid in front gardens when they saw cars to conceal themselves.

For a few, darkness signalled not just a safety issue but the need to draw the journey for that day to a close or cease temporarily wandering and find shelter for the night, as Julie, a 26 year old woman expressed: *'It was getting dark and I thought I don't want to be wandering around in the dark. I went to a hotel'*.

Adults who had gone missing with the intention to commit suicide (33%) had initially at least a very definite location in mind. The location is usually familiar and might be chosen well in advance as one woman described: *'there's a cliff there I was going to jump off. It was the same cliff as I had plans to jump off years back'* (Coleen). For others, the destination might be familiar, but not pre-planned, as Sophie describes. Amidst an overdose Sophie was concerned that if she stayed at home her suicide attempt would be interrupted. This precipitated a need to find another location away from home: *'I don't know why I thought of that place, it was kind of perfect because it wasn't far away and I didn't feel I could go to anybody, obviously I couldn't drive, so it had to be somewhere I could get to on foot and somewhere that was secluded. Somehow I managed to be clear and*

there's a sort of derelict building a mile from my house so I just went there'. The decision-making exemplified by Sophie, but experienced by other adults in this study, confirms findings from a recent Australian study on missing persons that found missing person suicides and suicide attempts tend to be located in natural, outdoor locations, in contrast to non-missing suicides, which tend to occur in one's own home (Sveticic et al 2012).

Once suicide was attempted and failed or the adult changed their mind about attempting suicide, journeys resembled those of non-suicidal missing persons and contained a high degree of walking. Walking facilitated thinking about where to go next: *'I had only planned to hang myself. I had no back up plans so I was kind of left with the feeling of 'so what do I do now'. Eventually I thought I need to walk, I need to think about what I am going to do' (Amanda).*

SUMMARY

Here we have seen that the sense of elation at leaving 'the everyday' is replaced by '*crisis mobility*' (Parr and Fyfe 2012). This term refers to the sense of crisis accompanying the need to make decisions on '*where to go*' and '*how to travel*'. For the missing adults in this study, this mobility was not just about reaching a destination, and the time spent travelling was not '*dead time*' that needed to be minimized. Mobility was viewed as more than getting from A to B and often journeys finished where they began. Walking,

in particular, opened up possibilities of doing things in a way that other forms of transport did not facilitate. Walking served to help order thoughts and actions and was a means of taking control of the new mobile situation. The decision on '*where to go*' was in part managed by the dynamic interweaving of human perception and non-human actors and technologies. Adults reported avoiding crowded places and also CCTV surveillance systems. 'Where to go' was also influenced by the need to stay local and in familiar streets and visit old home addresses and places invested with meaning. Natural environments were 'active spaces' as use was made of hedges and front gardens for shelter and disguise. Overall, adults made conscious deliberate decisions to minimize the risks to personal safety that come with being lost, and in this sense missing is seen as quite distinct from being lost.

LEARNING POINT

Empirical findings suggest that although missing journeys can be taken at a time of great emotional and cognitive difficulty, journeys are not '*always*' or '*entirely*' chaotic – adults make planned and deliberate decisions about their geographies – which tend to be local and familiar (although they may cross police force boundaries). Adults are attuned to the environments they are in and how to navigate them to stay safe, go undetected and gain space and time to think.

3

ENCOUNTERS:

*Is anyone looking for me?
Should I hide?*

As the adult's journey progressed a tension was expressed between a fear of being looked for and wanting to be found as summed up by Caitlin:

'I kept watching because I thought someone would have reported me missing. Every time somebody came past, it was I wanted to be found, but I didn't want to be found, I wanted to be me, to be myself a bit longer'.

Although the adults might be unaware they have formally been reported as missing, journeys involved a degree of hiding behaviours. Adults hid from a range of actors, such as the police, family members, mental health workers friends and colleagues. Usually based upon a perception of who might be looking for them or give away their missing location as summed up by one female: *'I knew I had to stay away from authority, and I had to stay away from people I knew because they were already looking for me'* (Eliza). The thought of being looked for resulted in: *'panicking, I was really, really worried in case anyone spotted me'* (Agnes). Whilst many of the interviewees remained local, both male and female interviewees specifically avoided their street and

neighbouring streets in the areas they lived for fear that they would be detected: *'in case the police were at my house. I stayed around Bush road and didn't go on to my street. It was a proximity thing. I was far enough away but still in a familiar area'* (Malcolm). Further, knowing there was a possibility of being seen, adults took time out from moving to conceal themselves: *'but you might on your movements be aware that folk are looking for you so you might go out of sight for a bit or you'll lie down for an hour or half an hour in a way that's away from people or away from visibility, just to get your head together until something tells you just to move again'* (Wilma).

Hiding took a variety of forms and males and females equally reported that their journeys involved some aspect of concealment related practices (see Table 3.4). Forms of hiding were wide ranging: taking shelter to avoid detection; changing their physical appearance; going by a false name; avoiding CCTV; changing their clothing by stealing new clothes off washing lines or taking from charity bins; staying with friends who won't disclose their whereabouts; choosing places in the natural and built environment to conceal themselves.

Table 3.4
Hiding behaviours

Hiding behaviours	% of adults (n=39)	
	Males	Females
Changed physical appearance	0%	5%
Changed clothes	5%	8%
Wore dark or clothing to conceal face	8%	5%
False name	10%	3%
Hid in natural environment other places (inc parks, woods)	18%	10%
Hid in built environment (in friends, sheds and derelict buildings)	13%	16%

Column does not total 100% as people may have been involved in more than one type of hiding behaviour.

HIDING RESOURCES - USING THE BUILT & PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Adults used both the built environment and natural environment to hide themselves from detection with minimal difference between the sexes, demonstrating a high degree of resourcefulness. Male journeys (18%) involved higher uses of the natural environment, as one male describes how: *'I can go in the woods and nobody can find me because nobody would think of looking in there'* (Matt). In contrast female journeys (16%) involved higher levels of concealment through the built environment. Using a combination of busy urban areas and back alleys one female describes the tactics she employs to avoid detection from the police or her family: *'there's a lot of people in the West End that you could easily disappear in a crowd. I got very good at geographically finding my way around. I had to navigate my*

way so I didn't get caught by police or from seeing someone that looks like my mum and ducking in another direction' (Rhona).

A significant minority of adults who were conscious of police procedures avoided certain geographical locations, mainly transport hubs for fear of being tracked via CCTV: *I didn't go to the bus station the second time I went missing because the first time I went missing I was seen on CCTV getting off the bus'* (Coleen).

For others, although cognisant of CCTV and police search, the mix of size and population density of urban settings provided options for cover from technological and human detection as long as behaviour blended in with the surroundings: *'even though it was very intense in that area I knew that out amongst people unless I made a big show of myself and acted a right fool I'm just going to pass by'* (Max). Disguise as a form of hiding behaviour was present. Wearing dark clothing to reduce visibility at night was common to those who attempted suicide. For others, disguise also meant ridding themselves of distinguishable items: *'I realised that there is cameras along the road so depending upon what I am wearing I might be distinguishable. There was a backpack with me at the time, which I basically left, because it was distinguishable'* (Alex).

One female who had a police record reported purposeful alterations to her appearance, as well as dumping her ID:

'I dumped my ID. I'd seen it in the movies. I'd already dyed my hair. I've got a police record and they would have had photos of me, but now my hair was like a dark red colour. I bought myself a pair of scissors so when I got to the bus stop I stood there and I took my hair and I cut it off' (Wilma).

In contrast, some interviewees did very little to specifically conceal themselves through the use of the natural environment against detection: *'I wasn't really too bothered. I mean I wasn't doing anything, I just didn't want to see them. But not so much that I bothered walking through fields or across barbed wire and stuff' (Nigel).* Although unfazed by the thought of police intervention, this did not mean the interviewees readily revealed their locations.

SUMMARY

Section three indicates that as adults travelled on their missing journeys they grappled with constant dichotomy of 'a fear of being looked for and wanting to be found'. As part of this dynamic adults were attuned to both technological and person centred surveillance and this influenced their decision-making and actions for navigating environments undetected. The thought of detection does not send missing adults to ground, rather conscious, deliberate decisions to minimise the risk of detection and harm to personal safety in navigating familiar environments was apparent. Although more men than women turned to the natural environment to conceal their location, only a minority made little to no use of the natural environment to hide.

LEARNING POINT

Missing journeys include a high amount of cognition in relation to hiding and disguise even in 'first time' missing person journeys. Further, the range of hiding behaviours employed shows the importance for the police or other agencies involved in searching to anticipate environmental resourcefulness and to ask a range of relevant people for in-depth information about the missing person's geographical preferences and routines.

4

SAFETY:

Where can I rest?

As journeys continued, the need to keep moving was interspersed with a need to rest. Resting was seen by the interviewees as ranging from a five-minute 'sit down' to finding somewhere to sleep and this took place in a range of environments:

'I wandered the back streets. I was taking seats every so often, there'd be benches I'd just sit on and I'd sit there for about however long, fifteen minutes at a time, just contemplating life' (John).

Adults used both physical and built environments on their journeys in a range of ways. Small and large parks in (semi)residential areas were popular resting places and featured in forty-six percent of missing journeys. They often had benches and the trees provided shading for adults from potential passersby:

'There's like a park there. I remember sitting on a bench in there for ages. Watching basically drunks walk past and the cops were on the go and, the trees sort of shaded and nobody noticed you. I just sat there for ages and ages' (Trish).

Interviewees living in Scotland, because of their easy accessibility, more readily represented cliffs, beaches and seashores as places to rest. They identified these as calm environments for adults to contemplate their situation and take time out from physically moving, for example:

'Just sitting along the beachfront and looking out to sea. I sat for a while just looking at the waves and the beach. I suppose over the years we have gone for a walk along the beachfront. Even in the winter, I quite like it there' (Sarah).

Even though interviewees recognised the potential for detection at railway stations, they were specifically sought out as places to stop momentarily and take stock: *'the railway station and sat down and thought about what to do'* (Julie). Like the beach, stations provided a calm environment to rest: *'I find it very calming, stations. And so I went there for a wee bit'* (Jim). Adults are not just drawn to these places for travel and rest, but because they act as symbolic spaces – providing a series of possibilities for travel – not always taken up – and a sense of hopefulness. Adults spoke

about how they felt *happy* in these locations: *'I was more drawn because I just thought how lucky people were, to be able to go and travel, have that freedom to do that'* (Gareth).

Thirty-eight percent of adults reported, *'when I was out I just kept walking I couldn't sleep'* (Matt). However, as journeys progressed some involved the need for shelter so adults could rest and think about their next move. Still not ready or unable to reconnect, adults utilised the environment for sleeping and Table 3.5 shows the range of places stayed.

Table 3.5
Places stayed

Places stayed	% of adults (n=44)	
	Males	Females
Slept rough	16%	18%
Hotels/B&Bs	11%	11%
With friends	14%	9%
With strangers	2%	9%
Other (including refuges, airports)	2%	7%

Column does not total 100% as adults may have stayed in several places whilst others might not have stayed in any.

One of the places that featured in both male and female missing journeys was hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation (22%). For some, hotels were booked before they left whereas, for others, a hotel room was necessitated by the fact it was getting dark and a place to rest and consider their options was required. Hotels were chosen in familiar areas and in some cases they had been stayed in previously. Hotels provided relief from constant mobility, as well as a place to hide in relative safety: *'I ended up just*

booking in to the hotel and I thought right I'll be safe here for the night and then I'll see what happens tomorrow' (Mathew).

Safely away from the public eye, staying in hotels increased feelings of personal safety. However, cognisant that police check local hotels as a precaution quite often adults checked in under a false name and paid in cash to avoid detection: *'I gave a false name and address because I paid cash and just in case the police came round and checked. It's one of the things that you think they do. That they might check the local hotels'* (Malcolm).

Whether a person stayed in a hotel and how long for was dependant on money and so was not an option for everyone. For others, no consideration was given to hotels and friends and associates provided shelter instead. Sometimes unaware that the person had potentially been reported as missing: *'I don't think I was thinking beyond that night. I phoned my friend and just said I was coming over to stay, which he's really happy with anyway. I didn't tell him about anything'* (Jack). Another male said, *'I spent time in a friend's flat. On Saturday pretty much from the afternoon right through the night until the morning time'* (Lewis).

Male journeys (14%) marginally involved a greater degree of staying with friends than female journeys (9%). Decisions over who to contact were based on a perceived ability to be discrete. If this was in question then: *'there was one or two people I could have phoned, but I knew for one that they would phone my wife instantly'*

(Andrew). Not every adult disclosed their situation and those that had not, moved from friend to friend, or stayed with a range of friends in combination with other types of places. However, the need to find alternative shelter occurred because it was only ever a temporary solution, which for some led to rough sleeping:

'I went to my friend's mum's place to stay. I couldn't stay there for too long because my friend's mum who put me up for the second night, she had her own mental problems and so she couldn't have me for another day. So I went to homeless in the town' (Jasmine).

In some cases initial attempts to make contact with friends or associates for shelter were unsuccessful, this deterred adults from getting in touch with others and they looked for alternative places to sleep in the urban and commercial environment, such as derelict buildings, sheds, squats, and underpasses. The need to look for somewhere to stay meant that adults engaged in risky behaviour, such as staying with strangers:

'I stayed with this couple of lads in this really run down flat. There was no proper light, a real mess, like a tip. It was pretty desperate. I went up and announced myself. I suspected they were drug addicts by the looks of it, the way the house was, the way they were. But they had the settee and I think they gave me a duvet and I slept there that night. I was very grateful' (Daniel).

Staying with strangers for shelter also provided cover from the police and others who could be looking for them:

'Well the thing is I didn't want to be in the way of police anyway because then they would have found me earlier and I just wanted to hide somewhere if I could. So when I found that man I settled down with him and fine. And it was a hiding place and I went to his house. I said "you've got a nice house". Although I'm not sure if it was really, I was acting it, saying it was nice' (Eliza).

Transport hubs, such as bus and train stations, as well as airports with their high footfall, offered opportunities for adults to rest, eat, wash and sleep masked by the rhythms of these space, as indicated by this quote: *'someone with a bag looks like any other traveller'* (Letisha). Two adults spent time sleeping in airports and used the rhythms of this space to disguise their missingness, as indicated by this quote: *'lots of people arrive early for flights they've got to catch early in the morning and they stay over at the airport so you don't really stick out'* (Daniel). Although airports provided shelter, there was recognition this was only ever a temporary space to rest and wash, as they are heavily policed and surveyed:

'I wanted to stay in the airport again, but I said to myself 'I might not be lucky this time they may call the police. Not that I was behaving funny but for the fact that I was sleeping there' (Letisha).

Unsure where to else to go and with the feeling there were few options open to them adults expressed that: *'you know without any money I just picked the nicest park and sort of said well I'll sleep here'* (Andrew). What may be surprising is that missing people as predominantly members of 'homed communities' – not homeless – reported thirty-four percent of their journeys utilised the environment for rough sleeping; alone and with others in various environments. Although in the minority, one 20 year old female mentioned joining activist movements to secure shelter and food, which led to being highly mobile:

'When I'm missing I've been in places where they're making tofu casserole. I went to go and stay on this hippy commune. When we got shut down from there we moved around. We went to Wiltshire, we went down to Stonehenge. We went all the way round the British countryside and we just camped up, pitched up and I mean who was going to find me?' (Rhona).

Adults spent time looking for shelter to sleep on the streets and were helped by homeless people to identify particular places. For example, one male mentioned: *'I came across somebody who had been sleeping rough and he told me where to go, it was a tunnel I was sleeping in'* (Gavin). Sleeping rough sometimes took place alone or with others and in combination with people known or strangers. Sleeping outside meant for some being exposed to the elements

and adults sometimes slept in the day when it was warmer:

'It is relatively sheltered. There is quite a lot of trees and things around so you didn't get much wind at least' (Wilma).

'In the day time I used to walk down to the beach. Occasionally I slept on it if it was sunny down there because it was warm you know if the sun was out and you couldn't sleep much at night with the cold basically' (Andrew).

Some sought out secluded and sheltered environments, such as parks, fields, woods and beaches to protect them from the cold weather and to avoid detection:

'I walked along the canal and then found somewhere in a field, a little wood off the road and found a very secret place and bed down there for the night. I wasn't too worried about, the main priority is not be noticed by the police and causing trouble. I wasn't that worried about being attacked or being robbed' (Daniel).

Sleeping rough was challenging because of weather, feeling cold and the risks it posed to personal safety. More females than males mentioned that sleeping rough was often emotionally as well as physically the lowest point of their journey, as Rhona described: *'In London when we didn't have a building to squat we'd just stay on the streets. That was when it was worse. I was just so depressed and it*

was cold, it was wet.'

During these times, thoughts turned to:

'You had to really think about getting through, not necessarily get sorted, but get through it for another night. By the time you got to where dawn was coming, birds start twittering and all the rest of it and you think 'oh at last I hope it's going to be a good day and not pouring with rain' (Andrew).

SUMMARY

This section has reviewed adult engagement in environments where they seek places to rest. The constant dichotomy of 'a fear of being looked for and wanting to be found' coupled with the desire not to be lost or unsafe were constant tensions when resting or finding somewhere to sleep. Lack of 'sleep hygiene'³ including prolonged wakefulness can produce unpleasant bodily sensations and stress. In missing journeys former routines of everyday life can be seen to disintegrate and this included sleep hygiene. Some created different

temporal rhythms, facilitated by the environment, and which saw adults sleeping in the day compared to the evening. The need for 'risk free sleep' was a priority for the adults reported missing and their chosen resting locations ranged from the natural environment, such as the beach, park and woods to urban settings, such as airports, rail and bus stations, homes of strangers, friends and relatives, back streets and hotels. The lowest emotional and physical point of their journey was identified as sleeping rough.

LEARNING POINT

The physical and natural environment is a resource upon which adults draw on for rest and to hide. Choosing areas with high footfall and public facilities, engaging with others to acquire local knowledges on places to sleep, employing altered rhythms – arrhythmic even – to sleep, wash and eat are all characteristics of missing journeys. Investigations, whilst they need to be attentive to the spatial dimensions, should prepare to take account of the temporalities of missing journeys and plan core investigative search action with sensitivity to altered senses of time on missing journeys.

³ The definition of 'sleep hygiene' as offered by the National Sleep Foundation is "Sleep hygiene is a variety of different practices that are necessary to have normal, quality night time sleep and full daytime alertness." (<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/article/ask-the-expert/sleep-hygiene>)

5

RISKS:

Where do I go next?

After the initial few hours or days and as journeys continued adults reported making decisions about where to go next and where to avoid. Thoughts at this time were preoccupied with questions of alternative routes and geographies providing the possibility to *'start again from there'* (Rachel). Decision-making about *'where do I go next?'* were framed by latent risk avoidance strategies tied to the occupation of space.

Walking routes were by this point in a journey well trodden and extensive and some adults reported fragment memories of *'where I walked.'* This was because: *'whenever I'm depressed one of the fairly clear signs that something's badly wrong is gaps in my memory. I continue doing what I was doing but my concentration's lost and I'm doing it in auto-pilot'* (Coleen). Despite emotional difficulties and the possible risks to personal safety this brings, in the main interviewees reported high amount of cognition in relation to navigating environments. At times this involved risky behaviours that, for example, saw adults walking: *'up the railway line at one point. Walking right in the middle of the ties of the sleepers'* (Douglas) or walking across building and rubbish

sites: *'it was like a building site or a trade centre, and there was huge amounts of waste and litter and just things lying about, and rotten bits of metal and stuff. There was no way you would normally take this path, behind the buildings, behind the workspaces'* (Wilma).

Adults employed risk avoidance strategies also through avoiding locations that could pose a risk to their personal safety, for example as John states when discussing why he did not: *'go down by the river because basically I thought I'd get the urge to just to jump in'*. Further strategies for risk avoidance saw routes that had previously been walked revisited, but the choice of routes was driven in combination with a need to rest and keep moving to avoid risk of detection: *'I think I was looking for somewhere to sleep or to sit. I know I was going to walk along the beach again. I just felt like I still had to keep walking. I couldn't stay still 'cause if I stayed still too long they would find me. My head was still full of everything and full of nothing'* (Trish). Plans chopped and changed and one of the reasons was depleting energy levels: *'the plan was to go for one of my epic walks, but the weather was horrible and cold. And usually*

even in the winter I like to walk down there, but I didn't do the walk. I didn't have the energy' (Rachel). Another reason was in response to areas being: 'quite busy, there were still people hanging around so I just started walking towards Richmond' (Leon). Changing locations in response to fear of detection demonstrates one of the key risk avoidance strategies employed by the adults.

Despite a recognised risk of being caught, especially on CCTV that featured early in journeys some adults (re)considered using public transport later in journeys:

'I wandered the streets. I went down to the train station, I was going to get on a train to Edinburgh because I really like Edinburgh, it's my favourite city in Scotland. But I saw how much money I had. I saw I didn't have enough for a train' (John).

Although public transport was a consideration it was not always taken and this depended on its frequency as adults didn't want to risk 'hanging around': *'I remember checking the train times but the next train due was in two hours' time and I don't think it was in that direction either, so then I just continued walking' (Trish). Travel plans were for some also money dependant: 'I asked the taxi how much it would be to go to this place and I didn't have enough money. So I went back down to the beach and sat there for a while' (Andrew).*

Where to go via public transport varied

and was based on a combination of going where adults knew the risks of being lost were lower and where they could afford: *'I just got the first train to Dublin because Dublin was where I knew and it was the nearest place to get to and was reasonably cheap' (Gavin). In a small number of cases, it was sometimes based on a perceived understanding of the environment in other locations, gravitating towards areas that would facilitate well-being and opportunities to be outdoors:*

'I just went to National Express and jumped on a coach going north. I had the thought of going to the beach where the weather would be nice and away from the stress of London' (Jim).

For others, walking routes meant that adults had gone away from familiar areas and so felt their personal safety was at risk. Public transport facilitated return to more familiar places:

'I remember not having enough fare to get back to Essex. I was more familiar with the area. I ended up just sitting there sobbing, and a lady came up and she said 'is it money my dear?' and I tried to say no and she took it out, the money and she gave me £20' (Jasmine).

Intended destinations were not always reached as routes changed and adults reported feeling suddenly at risk or unsafe and cited this as one of the reasons for getting off trains and buses before their end destinations, or for diverting where they walked.

Another reason was tickets weren't available for the original destination:

'I just wanted to get away. I went to the train station, tried to buy a train ticket for London. I think the train was full, I just couldn't get a ticket. Put some money in the machine and got on for Kyle where I was born, so then it was onto Plan B, Highlands' (Caitlin).

A route change can also occur through conversations with others and were connected to risk behaviours around perceptions of safety:

'He was "where are you off to?" And I was like "I'm in a wee bit of trouble so I'm thinking of going to London." He said, "London's the first place to look for you love. Come back with me, right?" And I felt safe with him so I went back on the bus and he took me back to the bus station' (Wilma).

Occasionally this occurred because the adult was not alone in making decisions:

'It was either the train or somebody had a van. We played the left and right game. Get to a road, left or right? Left. Next road, left or right? Right. We'd just end up in Lincoln, Manchester, Bradford' (Rhona).

Routes were chaotic and fragmented for some, but to reduce the risk of being lost still involved familiarity, as expressed by this female:

'I ended up in Birmingham and stuff and I just got the first flight out. It was starting to get late so I went to Wolverhampton. I came out the train station, walked, and just again went left, right, whatever way I felt, and the next thing I was in the bus station. I didn't try to get there but I was in the bus station. And there was a moving, scrolling billboard that said guesthouse. So I went to that guest house, and in that guest house I spoke to somebody, a woman at the breakfast table, and I told her I was thinking about going to London, "cause I knew someone in London"' (Wilma).

Although adults didn't always have the money, they still engaged in travel via public transport either being bought tickets by others, or being let on for free or dodging ticket fares, despite a possible risk of being caught:

'I bumped into two guys at the train station and they had a spare ticket to Glasgow, and they gave me it, and I spent the train with them' (Wilma).

'I did just get on a train and not pay for it. I just jumped on and luckily no ticket inspector came on and checked me' (Daniel).

Deciding which trains to take to avoid paying the ticket fare was opportunistic, but once successful some interviewees revisited the same lines knowing that it is a possible and relatively risk free option for travel. For some, planning to take

public transport was less about the destination, but was seen as a way to get some much-needed sleep somewhat risk-free:

‘So I’ll wait till the morning and I can get a bus and I can sleep on the bus to wherever it goes’ (Trish).

The interviews illustrated that no matter how long the missing adult is away, as time progresses the continual development of a plan in relation to *‘where to go’* and risk perception combined with continual walking is extremely challenging and tiring. Along with this, the ever-present risk that someone might be looking for them meant the need for *‘safe spaces’* was identified.

Table 3.6
Places visited

Places visited	% of adults (n=82)	
	Males	Females
Church	2%	4%
Library	2%	0%
Hospital	1%	4%
Shopping centre (inc. retail parks and leisure complexes)	4%	1%
Cafes, restaurants, pubs	15%	10%
Green Spaces (parks, cliffs, gardens, woods)	14%	14%
Water (rivers, harbours, canals, sea)	9%	9%
Transport hubs (car-park, train, bus, coach stations, airports, petrol station)	5%	9%

Column does not total 100% as adults may go to several safe spaces.

THE NEED FOR SAFE SPACES

As journeys continue a greater need for safe spaces is experienced. Safe spaces, as shown on the table include a range of places in both the natural and built environments (see Table 3.6).

Safe spaces can be busy environments where the adult reported as missing is able to blend in and not look out of place. One such location visited mainly by females was hospitals:

‘I just kept walking round in circles, which were about three miles per cycle and I just kept walking them. Every time I passed the big hospital I had this feeling of its okay, people expect people to be walking around here, and so every time I reached there I would stop for five or ten minutes and felt okay about stopping there’ (Amanda).

Males and females frequently mentioned pubs, restaurants and cafes as safe spaces as they provided cover and a routine, as expressed by Mathew when talking about why he visited pubs:

‘I just went in there and got talking to people, you know, pretending that everything was alright and whilst I was talking to people in pubs I could pretend that I was living a normal life. I didn’t actually say anything at all. I just suppose

it is actually like giving the false name, you are actually denying what you are doing.'

too long I start to become self-conscious if I'm there without any bags and I'm just staring at people' (Julie).

Cafes provided a haven from walking and a safe space to reflect and plan as summed up in this quote:

'I just wanted to stop somewhere and have a cup of tea and a think. I sat there and I made out I read the paper. I sat inside near the window thinking I have to get away. It wasn't busy and there were families sitting in there. I felt safe there because it was like the police hadn't been so it was safe' (Trish).

The chance to go undetected meant that for some churches were attractive, as one woman mentioned: *'I am not a religious person, but I used to go to the church and there wasn't anyone there'* (Jasmine). For others, sites of religious worship were visited specifically to engage with others for help: *'I have been there before the church they use for events. I managed to speak with a few people just to ask if there was anything to, with the aim of possibility helping or doing something on a longer term rather than just the once'* (Alex).

Places were not inherently safe and could turn into non-safe spaces. This alteration was usually linked to the amount of time an adult can remain before a risk is perceived and the need to move again is experienced:

'I just needed to start walking again because if I sit down for

SUMMARY

Everyday spaces characterised by mundane activities were the 'scenes' many missing adults were occupying but feeling '*un-involved*' in. Time was filled with questions of '*where next?*' with adults ruminating on the best location for providing the possibility to 'start again'. The willingness and ability to do this was constrained by difficulties in the decision-making process which was, in turn, hampered by depleting energy levels. Different forms of movement and mobility produced situated temporal experiences orientating reported missing adults differently in relation to the socio-spatial and perceptions of risk. Interviewees used public transport – trains, buses, coaches – and expressed the need to get away or travel distances, but did not always reach their destination. Often travel was simply opportunistic or motivated by the desire to be safe. As time away extends, and missing experience deepens, a greater need for safe spaces are expressed. A safe space is not equated with a quiet place, but presents challenges and risks to adults as they have to negotiate interactions with others (or things), as seen in their experiences of visits to pubs, cafes, and restaurants.

LEARNING POINT

Adults visit a range of places in relation to perceptions of risk and safety and often interact with others in the process. Publicity and missing campaigns directed to the places evidenced in the narratives above would be of benefit. '*Encounters*' with public transport officials, community wardens, postal workers and others in the public realm are significant and publicity campaigns could be targeted at such figures, helping them to understand the journeys missing people undertake.

6

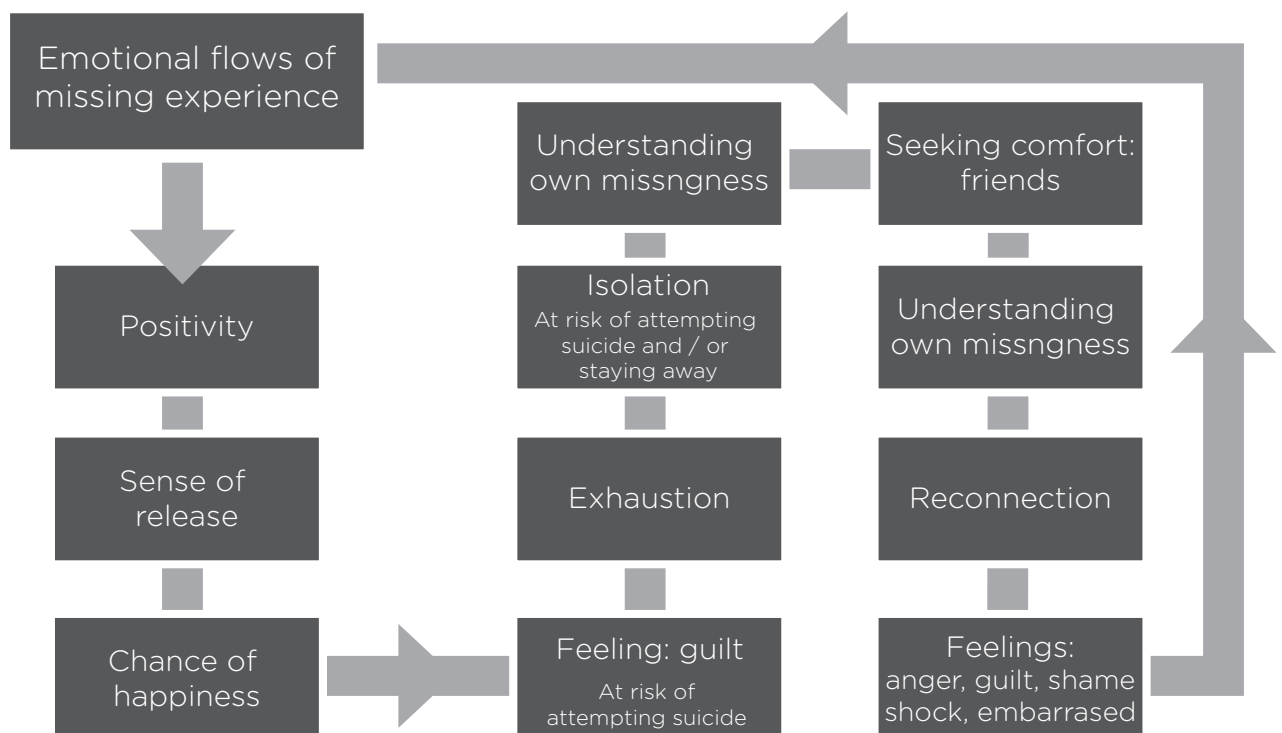
EMOTIONS:

How do I feel about this?

Overwhelmingly, and for the majority of interviewees, being on a journey with uncertain outcomes can be traumatic and tearful: *'I was hysterical a lot of the time. I was crying pretty much the whole way'* (Rachel). A minority of adults, initially at least, did not experience emotional upset as three males expressed: *'I didn't feel emotional. I don't really remember too much emotion there. As long I could get away and get through the*

night or something I figured I would be able to make it okay' (Alex). Feeling 'no emotions' could occur in circumstances where being reported as missing was linked to severe depression. Emotionally 'switching off' was also a coping strategy: *'emotionally I had totally switched off. When you have had so much go on you can just switch off. You have to, you know'* (Darren). For others going absent was a response to the

Figure 3.1
Emotional flows of missing experience



loneliness they felt: *'I didn't know where I was going to go, I just felt the loneliest person in the world'* (Eliza). Journeys were complex and nuanced emotional events and interviewees reported feeling a range of emotions throughout their accounts of these unusual geographies. Emotional experiences were both the product and the outcome of decision-making in relation to choosing modes of transport, whether to hide or not, where was safe to rest and to interact with others.

As Figure 3.1 shows one possible representation of the *'emotional flows'* of missing journeys were the act of leaving was often initially characterised as positive. This was particularly the case for those absconding from mental health wards. Absconding provided: *'a release of emotion. It was a release from ward and a release of my pent up emotions and frustrations'* (Amanda). For adults who were not absconding, the thoughts of being able to start a-fresh meant: *'an excited feeling. Not the fact that I was leaving everybody, but the fact that nobody would know me, you know, it would be a-fresh start'* (Trish). Perceived feelings that a state of happiness would occur in certain locations drove destination choices: *'I was just thinking that I was happy there. You know, it was familiar. I hadn't planned on seeing anybody there or visiting anybody there'* (Jane). As adults started their journeys and progressed closer to a chosen destination, the pull of different emotions was apparent and the thought of being stopped by the police was enough to exchange

happiness for nervousness: *'in one way, I felt really happy because I thought I'm doing this. I'm soon going to be in Norfolk, but I was also really nervous the whole time that I was going to get stopped by the police'* (Agnes). Independence and the release of the burden from individual responsibilities and social expectations for adults of all ages was seen as positive. However, many felt the fear of being *'caught'* and a loss of regular routine.

As journeys continued, interviewees overwhelmingly reported feelings of guilt at being away. The majority of the sample lived alone (29%) and experienced feelings of guilt for leaving employers or businesses without informing them. Others spoke of friends and how they didn't want them to be worried. Adults with mental health problems reported breaking contact with families because: *'I just didn't want to burden my family and knew they would be worried'* (Lesley). Parents who left children because of depression experienced this as difficult and women felt ashamed that in going missing they were prevented from performing *'motherly'* duties of care. Feelings of guilt, loneliness, distress and isolation characterised the narratives of both men and women:

'I suppose that side of you is feeling a bit guilty about it and therefore you think everyone is aware of your situation and that they are all staring at you disapprovingly because you're just running away and escaping and ignoring real life and you are living in this little bubble for

however long you are' (Mathew).

Going absent was represented as a response to loneliness, emotional distress and isolation was experienced on journeys and one woman, who had been missing on and off since she was 15 years old, expressed that: *'I was by myself. I couldn't turn around and speak to someone about the way I felt. I couldn't talk to anyone and turn around and tell them the truth about why I was running away because I was scared of myself. I've never felt more alone in my life. It's one of the worst feelings in the world'* (Rhona).

Heightened emotions were reportedly experienced as disorientating, which made decision-making difficult:

'Emotional disorientation, it's like my brain is trying to survive all the emotions and thoughts that are going through it but it can't quite do that with the external world and the internal world at the same time, it can't seem to process both' (John).

SUMMARY

Feelings are important in missing journeys. Emotion is a way of registering the sensations of the non-cognitive realm which occur through the conduct and movement of the body whilst journey making. As Figure 3.1 shows, emotions at the start of the missing journey were for the most part positive, yet as journeys continue feelings of isolation, guilt, shame and embarrassment develop and these continued to circulate after the missing person returned or reconnection had been made. From the above accounts, and other studies (Biehal *et al* 2003), it seems that 'going missing' seldom provided a straightforward solution to the situations that people face in their lives and in many cases it compounded issues and made things more difficult.

LEARNING POINT

Reconnection campaigns and associated learning resources need to recognize and reflect the complex emotional dimension of missing experience as demonstrated in Figure 3.1: 'emotional flows of missing experience'. Acknowledging that cycles of emotions influence key decision points in journeys gives scope for sensitive and targeted follow-up with returned missing people in ways that might assist prevention of repeat journeys. Charitable organisations and mental health services may be well placed to develop such interventions.



COMMUNICATION:

Who do I speak to?

Missing journeys do not occur in isolation and feature a range of different opportunities and moments for communication.

Table 3.7
Communication practices

Communication practices	% of adults (n=72)	
	Males	Females
Used a mobile	27%	19%
Threw away	0%	12%
Turned on/off	27%	12%
Out of charge, no signal	19%	8%
Changed Sim card	8%	4%
Ignored contact via mobile	19%	23%
Made contact via mobile	23%	23%
Made contact with others	19%	27%

Column does not total 100% as adults may have communicated in several ways whilst others may not have communicated at all.

With mobile phone ownership by adults almost ubiquitous in the UK at ninety-two percent (Ofcom 2012), this technology could appear to be seen as a key communications tool. Yet, only twenty-three percent of interviewees had a working mobile phone with them when reported as missing. The adults in the sample without access to a phone (67%) report this was a mix of accidental and deliberate factors. For adults living in rural environments, phones were not part of their everyday communicative practices and so they weren't used to having them

with them or keeping them charged. In these cases, and where an adult had left with a phone, twenty-seven percent reported that they had no means to charge it. For others, being in a hurry to leave also contributed to not having a mobile phone on their person. For the majority, however, leaving a phone behind was deliberate as they wanted to reduce the chance of being contacted or tracked and to experience a sense of freedom on their journey.

Those adults that had a mobile phone with them (23%) engaged in a range of communications (see Table 3.7). One male, Innes, was in a location where he had no signal on his phone and so was non-contactable. A small minority of females only, concerned that they could be contacted via their phone threw their mobile phone away:

'I actually abandoned my phone when I was out. Part of you feels that you have to be free of any external, something that may break what's going on. If I'd got a phone call at one in the morning then it's gonna take me away from that path and other experiences that I feel like I'm meant to have' (Wilma).

Abandoning phones often did not occur before a phone had been used or digital trace was left through social media:

'I'd been using my phone to go on my Facebook and I was getting messages and I was reading them and I just thought like "why are people sending me these messages it doesn't make any sense" and I was getting a bit freaked out and I threw my phone away' (Julie).

Rather than simply abandon a mobile phone, more male interviewees than females reported changing numbers and swapping Sim cards. Possessing a mobile phone was seen as giving legitimacy to being in a particular location and allowed the formation of new identities, as Max who has regularly been reported as missing, explained:

'With new people in a new area similar to yourself then you have got more chance of blending in and not being noticed as an outsider. So with a new chip and a new number you will have their numbers in. You are creating a whole new identity within another area'.

In contrast, rather than identity formation, changing Sim cards was about control, allowing the lines of communication to remain open, but reserving the right to make contact rather than be contacted: *'I didn't want anyone contacting me but I still wanted to contact people. I left my*

current phone switched off. I used the old phone with the phone number that I had had from a couple of years previously' (Darren).

In comparison, although aware that it was likely that contact could be made, adults kept their mobile phone and: *'I had my phone off so people couldn't contact me. So the hospital couldn't chase me up' (Alex).* Unable to cope with others' emotions and the need for time-out adults switched phones off:

'I really didn't want to be contacted and I didn't care that people were worried. I just wanted to protect my own head. It was completely selfish but I didn't want to have to think about anybody else's thoughts apart from myself and even then I didn't want to have to think about myself' (Rachel).

A significant number of adults (39%) ignored a ringing phone knowing that: *'at that time in the morning it was going to be either the police or the hospital' (Amanda).* In contrast, some: *'would ignore it, and then I would eventually give in' (Caitlin).* Answering the phone was often a response to buy more time: *'I want you to know I'm okay but leave me alone' (Caitlin).* Police and families contact adults reported missing through their phones. Although contact was made, locations were not disclosed or false information given to keep their current location secret:

'They were like "look we just need

to know that you are ok, tell us where you are" I just kept sort of winding them up more and just telling them that I was in places that I wasn't' (Nigel).

Surprisingly, some interviewees report making contact with friends and employers via either the phone or face-to-face while they are still missing. The need to talk and think things through with those that understand was important:

'I phoned Tony. Tony's voice doesn't show much emotion and I think he was probably doing his absolute best to sound calm. Tony is the only one where I'm not going to be met by someone who is not panicking or completely confused' (Coleen).

Contact also took place face to face:

'I went to my friends and while I was there a friend rung up and he was going 'no I haven't seen her' and he kept saying 'oh she'll be alright', but he knew I was alright because I was sitting there, but they weren't to know that otherwise they would of sent the police up and I didn't want to come back and so it was like time to move on' (Michaela).

Key figures do not always report contact and some actively discourage adults from contacting the police whilst reported as missing: *'the police were still phoning me at that time and [my friend] was like "no, don't phone them, don't phone them at all"' (Nigel).*

The need to make contact with others on journeys resulted in turning phones on and off, as one female explained:

'I think I kept turning it on to see if he'd rang and then turning it straight back off again. I think by that time [my daughter] had text me and [my friend] had text me and [my other daughter] text me and I didn't want to look at their stuff. And then once I got his text I just turned the phone back off' (Trish).

When turning phones back on, there were often messages of concern from a range of people. Jack described a message from his boss, who had reported him as missing but not disclosed this:

'Yeah I had 9 or 10 missed calls from the guy who was my area manager. I knew obviously he had been wondering where I was and I had a text message saying 'if you are alright Jack get in touch' and then later that night, he had sent one at 10 o'clock that night saying 'I'm really worried about you' and stuff like that, but at no stage did he say 'I'm going to phone the police' or 'I have phoned the police' (Jack).

Aside from messages of concern, adults reported receiving communications from friends advising them that they have been reported as a missing person: *'he texted me to say that the police had been in touch with him asking if he had seen me because obviously [girlfriend name] had reported me missing and I*

went right okay' (Lewis). Occasionally, adults made decisions to closedown future communication, as they were keen not to get their friends in trouble. For others, the volume and content of messages received when they turned on their phone meant they felt emotionally overloaded, as one female, missing for seven days explains:

'Messages from your friends and family about you being missing and contact the police does not help at all. I turned my mobile on again and read out. I didn't read all of them because there was an awful lot of messages, which all said the same. It was like mass hysteria on your mobile and you don't want to be responsible for everyone else's emotions. You can't cope with your own and then everyone is throwing everything, their anxieties at you and you don't need it' (Rachel).

SUMMARY

In this section we have understood that connectedness and communication with those left behind via mobile phones was deliberately abandoned. Mobiles were used in establishing new relationships during the journey with control exercised around this contact. Adults wanted to know that people cared, but turning a mobile phone back on and receiving a barrage of messages was not seen as helpful. However, journeys did not remain contact-free and adults sought out friends for face-to-face contact and for company.

LEARNING POINT

Families of adults who repeatedly go absent could be educated in the best way to use mobile phone communication with their missing relatives. A range of support services could advertise themselves as 'points of (re)connection' with and for adults reported as missing.



NEEDS:

Where can I wash & eat?

Respondents discussed how they coped on their journeys, drawing on the built environment and commercial places, for resources, and rest, food and washing (see Sections 4 and 5). Not every adult reported eating or drinking on a journey: *'I don't eat, I don't sleep either. I just keep walking'* (Matt). In contrast, those that did, visited a range of places as shown in Table 3.8, from fast food outlets to convenience stores.

Table 3.8
Places visited for eating / washing

Places visited for eating/ washing	% of adults (n=86)	
	Males	Females
Public toilets	4%	3%
Shops	12%	13%
Cafes, restaurants, fast food	8%	8%
Bins	1%	1%
Retail parks	1%	0%
Pubs, inns	12%	8%
Refuges, shelters	3%	6%
Others'	10%	10%

Column does not total 100% as adults may have visited several places.

For those with access to funds, pubs and small hotels provided opportunities to eat and wash in comfort and relatively unnoticed:

'I had a few pub lunches. I don't

recall buying them let alone eating them. I remember having a meal in the pub in the evening and there was some raucous couples sitting together and I felt irritated. I remember having the best part of a bottle of wine to myself and just sitting there an trying not to cry really' (Rachel).

Others, unable to afford pub and hotel prices visited cafes where they could have a drink and contemplate the situation:

'I just went into McDonald's and had a cuppa tea in the cafe. Well when I was havin' a cuppa tea I was lookin' in my tea and just thinking to myself 'I wish I was dead' (Gavin).

'I had a cup of tea in a cafe and thought to myself 'god I haven't even got the money to buy myself anything to eat 'cause I given it all out to everybody. I've got nothing, I haven't even got a life, I've got no money' (Trish).

A combination of price, the need to keep warm and waiting times, prompted adults when at railway, coach and bus stations to buy: *'cups*

of coffee to keep me warm' (Agnes). Railway stations were key places where adults sourced food, going to newsagents and: *'walking into W.H. Smith and I'd spent quite a while trying to find the right food to eat, like I've got to pick the right foods otherwise like something might go wrong'* (Julie). Mainline railway stations provided fast food options, which were open early in the morning and late at night making it easy for adults to source food and move on: *'I did go there because there are fast food places inside the station and I just went in there and grabbed something'* (Mathew).

Adults became savvy at finding places to source foods and one of the locations visited were 'soup kitchens':

'I was lucky and with the gentleman that was with me, he found out where I could get food. He said there is one place that you can get food free and he took me to the place' (Eliza).

Commercial places, such as retail parks also provided opportunities:

'I spent some time looking for food. In the industrial estates, with B&Q and McDonald's and PC World, is where I found food to eat from bins' (Alex).

The combined need to fill time and not to draw attention to themselves led adults to adopt new routines for washing and finding clean clothes. As a result, adults engaged in hiding behaviours connected to such routines: *'for weeks I just travelled*

about and after, every couple of days I'd get myself some fresh clothes, go and get cleaned up and washed and dump my other stuff. I didn't want to be seen, I didn't want to be found' (Max).

Identifying suitable locations, such as public toilets to wash was important for those sleeping rough and this fed into their decision-making to visit familiar locations:

'It was imperative to know where to go, to go to the toilet and get washes. You don't really think about that if you are staying in a hotel but if you're not it becomes top priority to be able to get to somewhere you can at least, have a wash and particularly if you haven't got anything with you really' (Andrew).

Airports, with their readily available wash facilities and high footfall, provided another location to wash and get changed relatively unnoticed:

'You might have an outfit two days or something, but you want to freshen up. So I went into the toilets and changed in the toilets with the door shut and when I came out I freshened up in the sink' (Letisha).

As well as public toilets at airports, beaches, woodland walks and town centres, supermarkets provided: *'somewhere periodically to get cleaned up and I knew that Tesco's would be open most of the day so it was quite handy'* (Alex). Cafes also

featured as places to get changed and wash:

'I went into that café and got changed and had a wash and stuff. And I might be behaving differently and acting strangely but I'm still perfectly aware that I need to wash, keep myself clean and stuff and safe' (Wilma).

Males and females equally took the opportunity when in the company of friends and associates to eat and wash:

'I met someone in the morning who I hadn't seen for quite a while and he could see I was not in very good shape and he said "look you better come back to my house" and he said "do you want me to buy anything, because I'll get you something if you want" and I said "well, could you get me some razors?"' (Andrew).

'I remember I was pretty shabby because I'd been quite a few nights sleeping rough and he said "you really have been sleeping rough". When I stayed with him I remember taking what clothes I had and putting them in the washing machine and he lent me his clothes so I was all right for a few days' (Daniel).

SUMMARY

Motion and emotion are intertwined and in this study adults report being able to cope and stay in control by keeping walking and moving and this was sometimes seen as more important than eating or sleeping. Food sources included soup kitchens, waste bins along with retail outlets and meals from friends and strangers. Keeping clean was undertaken in public places and municipal and supermarket toilets and washing facilities in cafes. Further both rural and urban environments are used to source resources by adults in both first time and repeat missing journeys.

LEARNING POINT

Major transport hubs like railways and airports could carry advertisements for missing people and relay information about where they may find help, and digital display boards would be a useful method of communication here. Supermarkets and food distribution centres might be targeted as likely locations for missing people to gain resources.

9

INTERACTIONS:

Who can help me?

Two thirds of interviewees (62%) revealed human encounters occurred during their journeys and potential sources of these encounters are shown on Table 3.9.

Table 3.9
Encounters

Encounters	% of adults (n=53)	
	Male	Female
Family	6%	25%
Friends	15%	17%
Acquaintances	6%	9%
Strangers	19%	15%
Services (medical, social)	6%	6%

Column does not total 100% as adults may have had several types of encounters whilst others might have had none.

Encounters reported on missing journeys were both deliberate and accidental. Deliberate encounters occurred with acquaintances and friends. Adults who were absconding from mental health facilities would at times abscond with others: *'I went out with someone, one of the other persons that was in there. We just wandered round the shops, had a coffee. I think we went to the pub and I had half a Guinness'* (Douglas). Individuals used encounters to: *'wash and shave and all the rest of it. He worked at night and he went to bed and he said just stay as long as you like and gave me*

blankets and stuff like that' (Andrew). Another said that rather than a chance meeting, he deliberately contacted a friend via text and said: *'can you give me an address?'* (Darren), so he could have a place to stay the night. Although initially seeking out help from certain trusted friends, plans changed in response to a fear of being found by those looking for them: *'she [daughter] rang up asking him where I was and he [friend] said he didn't know, even though I was sitting there 'cause I said to him 'please don't say, I don't want any of that, I just want to be gone'* (Trish). Options for shelter through solicited encounters reduced over time, as Daniel explained: *'I found myself with nowhere to go all of a sudden and I didn't want to go back to the people I'd been staying with where I was overstaying my welcome. I don't know if I was thinking straight anyway but I was fairly desperate'*. The reduction in places to seek help forced adults to look for alternatives and engage in risky behaviours:

'I met him on the street. I think he was just going home and he said how he was lonely "Do you want to come home with me? I've got a spare bed" he said. "Do you want to sleep with me tonight?" he said

and well I would have just said, "yes I won't mind at all. It will be better than going to the street" (Eliza).

Although not always perceived as in danger, females engaged in risk through sexual behaviours to prevent themselves from having to sleep rough on the streets. Risky behaviours extended to drug use. Although a small minority, some adults reported contact with friends and acquaintances specifically to facilitate drug use: *'just go to a mate's and sort of take it from there. I phoned my friend and asked what he was up to and see if he felt like just sitting and getting wasted and whatnot, which he did'* (Lewis). The use of drugs was recreational, to help cope and forget about what was occurring (and this extended to alcohol as well). Although drug use by the interviewees was low, during their missing journeys they were exposed to drugs and sometimes for the first time through others they encountered:

'I got there they started to inhale heroin and I have never ever seen that before. I didn't know where I was, they locked the front door and they wouldn't let me out. Then I ended up jumping out the window trying to get away' (Jasmine).

Encounters with others meant that adults were exposed to dangers and risks that they had no previous experience of and they reported feeling threatened.

For others, feelings of risk were associated with chance encounters with the police. A small number of adults reported interacting with the police whilst missing, but in relation to other events: *'once the police walked over and asked me something but never asked me where I was from or anything or what I was doing in the park and I didn't say so'* (Walter).

For three adults, chance encounters drew journeys to a close:

'I met this bloke who was a friend of my son's actually. Anyway he said just go down the road to my mum's, she is away now, but she will come back if she knows that you are there. I walked down to this house and just sat on the wall and my son turned up about half an hour later absolutely furious' (Andrew).

The risks experienced by missing people are great and the need for greater awareness both publicly and professionally around types of encounters during crisis mobilities is important as this understanding may provide possibilities for intervention.

Tables 3.10 and 3.11 indicate the percentage of those who sought help on their missing journeys and indicates the range of sources for that assistance.

Table 3.10
Help sought

Help sought	% of adults (n=45)	
	Male	Female
Yes	25%	29%
No	29%	16%
Unknown	2%	0%

Columns may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Table 3.11
Types of help sought

Types of help sought	% of adults (n=52)	
	Male	Female
Medical	17%	7%
Directions/information	0%	7%
Shelter	10%	17%
Money	2%	2%
Food/drink	7%	7%
Support (inc. advice, talk, company, religious)	14%	29%
Transportation	2%	2%

Column does not total 100% as some adults sought help from a number of sources while others did not seek help.

Rather than seeking practical or financial help, for example, a more general need for interaction and to talk on a journey is present for many interviewees and pubs were one of the locations where informally supportive encounters could be easily facilitated: *'it wasn't that I needed to go to the pub. I think I just wanted company, I was very, very lonely as well and I often found myself not so lonely among strangers'* (Caitlin). Adults did not necessarily talk about their situation rather being amongst those that were not reported as missing provided them with a sense of normality and calm. They longed for emotional support and understanding that they had been unable to access before going absent and so sought out friends: *'just wanted to see my*

mate and just say how you doing and chat to him. I just needed somebody to emotionally bounce off a little bit' (Darren). Not always sure of what sort of reaction they would get, these encounters can be nerve-racking for the person reported as missing: *'I remember feeling really nervous because I didn't know how they would react when I knocked on the door and I knew that they would have had the police and everything in touch with them. Actually they just said 'thank goodness you are here' and they were really pleased to see me'* (Amanda).

For others who specifically wanted to talk about their situation, this resulted in visits to people from their past to ask for help, as one female described:

'I went to my neighbours who I don't really know very well. I asked him to have me committed. I didn't know what else to do. I just thought 'I probably am a danger to myself at this time and if I can be relieved from looking after myself that would be great'. Him and his wife gave me a gin and tonic and they suggested that I go and visit my mum in Europe. I didn't, but I left because I was mortified that I had just gone loopy at them' (Rachel).

Asking for help was reported as relating more to the risks interviewees felt in relation to their own mental health. The need for support by those that understood feelings of danger in association with mental health, led to *'sympathetic'* people being sought out as one female described:

'I called a mutual friend and I stayed with her. She was telling me about her experiences and she does group therapy and so she taught me some of the techniques. She was a great help' (Michaela). Encounters are not always disclosed to the authorities or family members and adults can both unconsciously or deliberately be concealed (see Section 3 also).

Who can't help me?

Over half (56%) of the interviewees attempted to seek help whilst reported as missing, yet this was met with varied response. What many adults report as a critical point is the need for services to pick up on signs of distress at the point of first interaction as this has the potential to halt a journey, as Trish describes: *'I got off in town and I rung my social worker. I went to go and talk and it was like she was busy and nobody cares what I do. So I couldn't go there'*. Trish went on to explain that later in her journey when she thought about ringing someone for help that: *'I think after ringing the social worker I sort of got no help from her so it sort of like "well she can't be bothered so nobody else could be and she's my social worker" so, you know, why even bother trying to ring somebody.'*

Some adults reported approaching agencies for help not in relation to specifically being reported as missing, but during their missing journeys: *'I was also meant to be going to check into the alcohol clinic at that point, which I had forgotten so I turned up*

about four hours late and they just said "we are not accepting you." So I said, "okay fair enough", so I went back down the road' (Andrew). Others turned to hospitals and twenty-four percent of interviewee's journeys featured an attempt to access medical assistance. Asking for help: *'I went into the hospital instead of going to the receptionist at A&E I couldn't, I found it all overwhelming. I just went into the hospital and found some seats and I slept on some seats and the receptionist called for security to kick me out'* (Jasmine).

Even when adults engaged with hospital staff, we have strong evidence to suggest that overwhelmingly the vast majority were turned away without either being seen or treated and their missing status never mentioned: *'I wasn't particularly well the depression. I wasn't physically well either. I went up to the hospital, I went into the reception. I told them I had mental health problems, but I think they asked me if I had been drinking. At that point I think they told me that I needed to go and see my own doctor. I said, well I don't live here, but they said we're not a bed and breakfast'* (Caitlin).

Those who were seen by medical staff received 'only' medical attention and the adult's potential missing status and the associated stressors weren't explored even when indicated: *'they kept me in, basically gave me a Valium and told me to "take this, get some sleep and call us when you wake up. Just go home". "I don't have a home". And they went, "well there's nothing we can do for you". They*

told me there was nothing wrong with me. I think they should have at least acknowledged that there was a problem there' (Rhona).

For interviewees one of the immediate concerns faced by them on journeys was their lack of a place to stay. Adults approached agencies for housing solutions, usually unsuccessfully, and so returned to the streets: *'after them not being able to help me it was like I wasn't a part of life anymore. I wanted to be dead. I was sat on the bench opposite the lift where people who work in the homeless centre had to come down. I had sat there for hours and even though I was very distraught and unwell people just walked past me anyway' (Jasmine).* A lack of support compounded the emotional distress and uncertainty that many adults had already experienced and left them unsure where to turn to next. This, as highlighted earlier, saw them sleeping rough and taking risks.

None of the interviewees accessed helpline services whilst they were reported as missing. Very few of the interviewees (12%) had heard of the Missing People charity and those that had did not make contact. It isn't clear why this is, but one adult gave the reason that: *'I would have been worried they would have been on the side of my family. That they might have told them and I didn't want them to know where I was. I didn't want to go home' (Jasmine).* Another adult who had gone missing with the intention to commit suicide thought the charitable 'message home service' didn't apply to her because: *'I couldn't truthfully pass on a message saying I*

was okay, because the nearest to okay I was, was okay so far, but not going to stay that way' (Coleen). Interviewees reported that they did not identify with the media stereotype of a 'missing person' and they said that whilst seeing the benefits of a helpline for others they would not have used a 'missing' helpline themselves.

Surprisingly, some adults considered family members as a potential source of support. The prospect of sleeping outside meant that they specifically sought out relatives to help: *'it was mainly because I was tired and I thought 'I can't sleep outside tonight' and so I just walked up to my sisters' (Agnes).* In contrast, not wanting to be *'a burden on them'* prevented contact with family members and in particular fear of being Sectioned prevented adults with mental health from approaching family or friends: *'you don't necessarily go to friends or family. Or you'll go wandering as opposed to going to your mum and because I have went to friends or family and spoke about what was going through my head, they just think you're mad and want to put you into an institution or put you to a doctor' (Wilma).*

Adults were unsure of the role of the police and whether they could be a potential source of help or not and in what ways. In interviews, the adults reflected that they did not always realize their rights to go missing and fearing arrest very few interviewees attempt to access police support (and this is discussed further in Sections 11 and 12).

SUMMARY

Interactions via encounters with others were both deliberate and accidental and included contacts with three key agents: i) family, friends and past acquaintances; ii) strangers; and iii) agencies perceived as possible sources of help. Communication with others was prompted by both physical requirements, e.g., the need for washing facilities, or a place to stay, and emotional needs for basic human interaction and more specific help in addressing emotional and material issues faced during their journey. All three types of encounters had associated risk factors for the adults. Friends and family might not be sympathetic and friends might contact families and family members might have adults sectioned, and strangers could exploit them, for example. Some adults turned to agencies for help, such as social workers, addiction clinics, A&E departments, homeless centres as these offered services that the adults identified as matching their needs. The adults did not seek help from the police or missing persons agencies, as they were not aware of what services were on offer. The police were rejected as a source of help because adults were unsure of their right to be absent from their everyday lives. Missing person agencies and helpline services were also rejected because the adults

did not associate their journey with that of a 'missing person'. Moreover, to ask the missing person agency to inform family and friends that they were 'alright' when clearly they were not, especially in the case of adults contemplating suicide seemed inappropriate. In all types of encounters asking for help was rarely ever about being reported as missing and instead related to the risks they felt in relation to their own emotional and physical needs.

LEARNING POINT

What many adults report as a critical point is the need for services to notice signs of distress at the point of first interaction as this has the potential to halt a journey. Support agencies, such as Missing People, are well placed to offer adults reported as missing help and support. In order to maximize service delivery this needs to be tailored to the needs of missing adults, who do not always identify with the label 'missing'. Messages of confidentiality need to be pushed in awareness campaigns so adults know their communication needs will be met in a safe and confidential way. Hospitals and their staff need to develop sensitivity to missing people and strategic campaigns and targeted messages could appear in these key places.

10

DECISIONS:

Should I go back?

All the interviewees in this study returned or were traced, with females returning sooner than males. In contrast to Biehal *et al* (2003), most of the adult interviewees that reported leaving from home returned to the place they had left. Others returned home after a period of time in a mental health ward or a short stay with other family members. Prompts to return and reconnect were varied and responses to these were influenced by the reasons for the missing episode (see Table 3.12)

Table 3.12
Prompts to return

Prompts to return	% of adults (n=65)	
	Male	Female
Being looked for	9%	5%
Return/reconnection	23%	18%
Safety/ontological security	5%	6%
Relationships (family, friends)	18%	11%
Pets	0%	5%

Column does not total 100% as some adults had thoughts of the world they have left behind while others did not have any thoughts of this nature.

Near equal numbers of males (36%) and females (32%) report having thoughts of home while they are reported as missing and these thoughts can be both a prompt for return and to stay away. Thoughts related to whether they had been

reported as missing or not and: *‘if what I’m doing is right and if she has found out yet’* (Darren). Doubts over whether adults had done the right thing by leaving also promoted consideration for return:

‘Well, I was startin’ to think I wasn’t going to come back here, but then when you are sitting there, you’ve never been home for a couple of days and things start coming into your mind like, “oh no, am I doin’ the right thing here?”, you start thinkin’ you’re having doubts and everything starts comin’ into your head like, “what you’re doin’?, money, the car?”’ (Mark).

Significant others were not always a consideration in the decision over whether to reconnect and those suffering depression or other mental health issues explained: *‘this was because depression is a very selfish thing and you lose your empathy. I wasn’t thinking of my family missing me. I stopped feeling full stop really’* (Jasmine). Interviewees who had left to commit suicide (33%) expressed that whilst on a journey to their intended location of death they tried not to consider reasons to go back.

'Trying not to think and to get rid of that thought in the back of my head, maybe I'm not doing what I should be. 'Cause I knew logically I wasn't doing the right thing but I also knew that I couldn't face doing the right thing which is go back' (Coleen).

Whilst in the location of intended death, thoughts turned to family, as well as being found:

'I know I was thinking about my family, especially my niece, she's a four year old, you know how much I had let her down. She was coming in and out of my thoughts a lot and I mean it was pretty much dominated by worrying that I was going to get found and have to face the music' (Sophie).

Interviewees who reported mental health issues spoke of an altered physical and mental response, which made it somehow safe to attempt to reconnect:

'I thought, well at one point I thought this is gonna be my life. I don't really know what happened in my thinking, but the next day I definitely felt different, like I felt a little bit better and more confident about trying to go home' (Julie).

Feeling physically tired added to the thoughts of wanting to go back:

'I just suddenly felt, like I just come back down or you start seeing things more basic again or you

feel like the danger has passed. It just immediately went like that and I was tired, exhausted. Two days you're exhausted, you want to go home, you do not want to be running around the streets' (Wilma).

Some adults wanted to return, but the thought of returning to a ward: *'meant that nothing would change'* (Amanda). In these cases adults went to friend's houses to talk and process their journey and in this way friends acted as 'brokers', smoothing a pathway of return to the ward. Similarly others, not yet ready to return to their own homes, but recognising the need to reconnect and end their current situation, specifically sought out friends:

'I felt I needed to see someone and she's my closest friend and I didn't want to go home. Because I guess by that time I was hiding or missing, hiding is a better word. Hiding from other people by that time but I needed to see someone because I was such a wreck. So I decided on her. She's the person I trust most in the world. And so I went to see her. So that was what then changed it' (John).

As well as providing support and comfort, friends helped to draw missing experiences to a close by encouraging those reported to make contact with services and statutory agencies. Friends being on hand during this time was seen as great comfort and helped to reduce the anxiety of many adults reported as

missing.

Reconnection with regular routines was a consideration and made the difference between staying missing and drawing a journey to a close: *'it was getting late on and I thought I can always stay at my friend's and I thought well I can't just impose myself here, I've got work tomorrow I need to do something, so I said right I need to get home'* (Lewis).

For others, thoughts of whether to go back were ambiguous and contingent and adults reported that: *'I don't want to go home, don't want to see anybody, but don't particularly want to stay here. It was horrible'* (Caitlin). Although they'd had enough of the present situation they were concerned with what they might face when they returned and considered staying absent: *'yes I thought about my family a lot yes, but not wanting to go back there because the situation was so bad. I couldn't see it being reconciled easy. So I thought I'd find work, find myself somewhere to live, set myself up again and then go from there'* (Darren).

Often battling with paradoxical feelings, children were unambiguous prompts for return for females:

'I just remember thinking I wanted to try and find my way back. There was a strong part of me that didn't want to go back at the same time. So it was like I was fighting myself. I could have ended up living another life, family not knowing where I was and just getting away. If I hadn't

had children I probably would have stayed away from my family and they wouldn't have known where I was' (Jasmine).

In contrast, six adults were clear that they did not want to go back: *'there was no way I couldn't. I think death would have been a more preferable option. Seriously at that point I just thought 'there is no fucking way I am ever going back'* (Rachel). Feeling that the situation they had left would not have changed and quite possibly worsen influenced interviewees:

'I didn't really particularly want to go home because I knew all this shouting and screaming and stuff was going to happen so I didn't see the point really, I didn't feel at any point that I'm just going to phone them and say "I give up". I just felt that I didn't want to go back, so I had to just carry on as best I could' (Andrew).

Many were concerned about their reception on return and were pre-occupied with feelings that their family was *'better off without them'* and some adults expressed how they thought staying absent was best.

SUMMARY

Decisions over *if*, *when* and *how* to reconnect were prompted by an aspiration to end the constant motion/emotion of the journey. When considering reconnecting, interviewees approached sympathetic agents to broker their return. In the main, brokers encouraged the adults to make contact with services and statutory agencies. The desire to re-establish everyday norms and routines helped to draw a journey to a close.

LEARNING POINT

Reconnection is frightening and confusing and adults shift between wanting to go back and wanting to stay away. Pathways to return are not singular, but friends have a key role to play in brokering these pathways. Literature and resources need to be aimed at friends to support them in their role as brokers for reconnection. For adults that are repeatedly missing, a service intervention enabling prevention or swift return needs to be established.



POLICE:

Will the police be looking for me?

In interview data we find that even though adults might not be aware that they had been reported as missing, police actions were considered throughout their journeys but to differing degrees. Considerations given to police intervention revolved around questions of police procedure: *'I wasn't sure if I was in trouble with the police or not. I didn't know and I thought if they found me I would get arrested. You don't know what procedures are'* (Walter). We found plenty of evidence of the myth that a person has to be missing for twenty-four hours before police involvement. This led to comments like: *'I suppose it's arrogance really that anybody would be out looking for me, when they don't actually look for you for twenty-four hours'* (Darren). Although the twenty-four hour rule was a widely held assumption, adults reported that they could not be certain they had not been reported missing and as time went on this led to: *'I kept watching because I thought someone would have been reported me missing. I was waitin' for the police to arrest me'* (Agnes). As journeys progressed thoughts of police intervention increased and tension was evident: *'I thought "oh God the police are going to come after me" and then also you*

want them to come after you because I need some attention, I need some help here and then I was going in-between' (Catlin). Uncertainty around police response and rights to go absent meant: *'I saw the police as a helping figure. They're there to help you and also there was a fear as well of authority. I hadn't done anything wrong but at the back of your mind, "God I have done something wrong, I've run away here"'* (Matt). Fearfulness acted as a barrier to accessing police help.

Adults reported missing more than once had the greatest awareness of police procedures and those absconding from mental health wards were aware the police had the potential to Section and return them if located:

'When I walked off the ward and I was returned by my mother who found me half an hour later I was informed that the police had been informed. So I knew that's what would happen. I also knew it would happen pretty quickly when they worked out where I was' (Coleen).

'You're a prisoner and you're in an

institution, and if you're deemed as insane then sometimes it's bigger hunt because you not only might be a danger to public, like a prisoner might be, you're also considered a danger to yourself, so you have a bigger search' (Wilma).

Surprisingly, adults who had experienced police involvement during previous experiences, still expressed uncertainty related to police response to missing situations.

Thoughts of police intervention related to an awareness of the police as potential sources of help, but rarely was this support accessed. Instead adults sought to distance themselves through: altering routes in response to seeing the police; taking side roads to avoid detection; seeking shelter away from sight and avoiding places the police were likely to have checked:

'Well the thing is I didn't want to be in the way of police anyway because then they would have found me earlier and I just wanted to hide somewhere if I could' (Eliza).

'Walked along and the next thing I remember is walking past the police station and it popped into my head to walk in there and announce my name. I didn't' (Coleen).

'I went past three times and every time thought 'I could go there. I'd be safe there' but then thinking I don't want to be found

and I guessed the police would have been in touch with them' (Amanda).

'I didn't know what to expect. I don't know what they do in missing persons, but I wasn't ready to do that. So I ducked down a foot path' (Rachel).

It was not always possible for the adults to avoid police interactions whilst reported as missing, but in some instances their missingness remained unchecked, as one man describes:

'Once they walked over and asked me, in fact I think it was twice they actually asked me something but never asked me where I was from or anything or what I was doing in the park and I didn't say so' (Jim).

Circumstances as described may lead to longer term missing situations than are necessary, leaving the adult exposed to possible risks and dangers.

LOCATED & POLICE INTERVENTION

For eleven percent of adults, the first time they realised that they had been reported as missing was via police contact. Hearing the news was traumatic and interviewees expressed feelings of shock, embarrassment and confusion: *'to see that I'd been reported as missing' causing a minority to: 'go quite deep into depression at that point. And I just*

thought what a mess everything was' (John). The involvement of wider networks by police for search and thoughts of wasting police time caused embarrassment:

'A message from the police saying "as soon as you get this message contact Grampian Police", which I did feeling really embarrassed. My boss had been here looking for me. They had been in touch with her. So it was really quite embarrassing' (Megan).

When interviewees first realised that they had been reported as missing via a police message left on their mobile phone, some continued to avoid police contact: *'one of them said contact "the police, we are worried", but at the time I just thought "I don't want to talk to anybody ever again"'* (Nigel). Other interviewees contacted the police immediately keen to draw police involvement to a close. Regardless of whether adults acted quickly or not, hearing the news caused them concern and: *'panic. And when you hear the words from the police, you're reported missing, all you think of is the worst that ... like your photograph is going to be on television, people are looking for you and it'll be on the newspaper before you can stop this from evolving into something worse'* (Gareth). Panic related to a loss of control to protect identity and related to the desire to keep a non-missing identity intact, further demonstrating the *'black box'* that exists around police procedures in the area of missing persons.

The data reveals seven percent of the interviewees had no police involvement as part of being reported as missing. Of those that did, fifty-nine percent of adults reported police involvement when on a missing journey compared to forty-one percent on return. The locations where contact took place are shown on the Table 3.13 and has been discussed by others (see Tarling and Burrows 2004).

Table 3.13
Place of police contact

Place of police contact	% of adults (n=60)	
	Male	Female
Refuge	0%	2%
Natural Environment (water, parks, mountains)	4%	4%
Urban areas (streets, city centres, retail parks)	12%	7%
Hospitals	4%	7%
Transport hubs (stations-rail, coach, bus, petrol harbour)	4%	9%
At home	11%	16%
Others home	4%	5%
Work	2%	0%
Via letters/email	4%	0%
Police Station	7%	2%

Column does not total 100%, as some adults did not interact with the police in relation to being reported as missing.

Ninety-three percent of adults reported police involvement as part of their missing journeys, yet actual police involvement varied and it was not always the police that drew adults missing journeys to a close, but associates, relatives and friends. Where police intervention did occur, it varied from a conversation on a mobile phone to visiting adults in their homes for a *'safe and well'* check, to returning adults to wards. The

interviewees remarked, that very little of the content stood out from their conversations with the police, but the overall sense was interactions were usually brief and perfunctory:

'The police turned up and said we just wanted a closure on the thing, we are not charging you or anything like that, it's just to put a finish to the missing persons thing' (Andrew).

'The police got involved but because I had not harmed myself and I had not harmed anybody else and I had not committed a crime, once you have been found you are off the list, that was the end of their involvement. My friends did more to try and find me, my colleagues' (Mathew).

'No. because I think they were just very quick at, they were just wanting to take me off the missing person's list' (Leon).

Adults reported: *'I didn't really expect much from the police really. All they could do is just close the case that's their job done'* (Megan). Ambivalence and displeasure in relation to police involvement was expressed, as well as surprise that they intervened in the missing situation at all. Many were often unsure what their rights are and if they are allowed to remain absent as these two males comment:

'The police actually stopped me and said "do you realise you have been reported missing?", "no I didn't actually" and I said "what are you going to do, tell her where

I am?" and he said "no, we just wanted to check you were alright and you look perfectly alright to me". If you are stuck or anything get in touch with us and that was it' (Andrew).

'Do you want to come with us?' I didn't have any choice given I was, if I had said "no thanks I want to go over there" they wouldn't have let me would they? So I walked with them' (Alex).

In contrast, repeatedly missing adults with mental health issues experienced high levels of police intervention and were more aware of police procedure when located as summed up here by Max:

'You automatically start to feel stressed like you "this means I have to go back and face all that shit" and I don't want to. You ain't really got no choice especially with the mental health. Unlike a missing person where they stop you, find out who you are and they say "people are worried about you" and they have to let you go on, but there is no legal way. But with me it's like "right you have got to come with us".'

Those interviewees with mental health problems who challenged the police in relation to return through questioning procedure were provided with limited response: *'I said, "why are you doing this?", "It's our job, that's what we have to do" and, that was it. They just all looked very polished and neat and tidy and were just there to do a job*

and get on with it' (Rhianna).

For those adults who were not being returned to a ward, interviewees reported feelings of shock that prohibited them from asking about police involvement, as Gareth commented: *'I never bothered to ask the police because I was taken aback, I was rather in shock, why the police are looking for me, and that was the shock'*.

Being unable to ask questions of the police meant for many their missingness remained a mystery to them and this led to long lasting feelings of unhappiness and prolonged trauma: *'I wanted to go back into the police station to talk to them and ask them questions. I just said, "ok fine". The only explanation they gave to me was that I was declared missing. I expected them to have given me more detailed information of what they did, and who they contacted. From that point of view I still don't feel happy'* (Mayowa).

Police involvement to many interviewees signified feelings of 'wrong doing' and adults wanted to limit interaction: *'I didn't want to be taken home in a police car because, in my mind I didn't think I had done anything wrong that had merited the police sort to give me a lift home and to come into my house'* (Mark).

Where actual police intervention occurred, adults reported varied experiences. Although keen to talk about the geographies of their journeys the data shows that the police asked few questions relating

to this, rather they appeared more interested to close matters quickly and move on: *'I would have liked the opportunity to talk to them and say look "this is where I went" so that they would then know. Whereas, they never really found out where I went'* (Amanda). This produces a lost opportunity for data capture and 'informed' policing (Shalev *et al* 2009 ; Parr and Fyfe 2012). Moreover, when the police visited interviewees for a 'safe and well' check, the venues were not always conducive to talking about their experiences and adults expressed anxiety: *'oh embarrassment more than anything else, I don't want to be having the police there for me, you know whatever happens away from work sort of thing, I didn't want to be in trouble you know. If he [the boss] turns up and sees the police then obviously he could go mental at me and I just didn't want that'* (Lewis).

Unsure of their colleague's reactions and the wish to limit speculation, the interviewees found police presence in workspace an intrusion and caused a great sense of anxiety. The same anxiety was also expressed in relation to the police turning up in marked vehicles at adult's homes.

Work colleagues and neighbours are unable to know the difference between legitimate and criminal behaviours, the uniformed officers signify to others the label of '*criminality*', which can have long lasting effects for recovery.

Police response to missing adults was varied (see Table 3.14), and the interviewees remarked on the factors that contributed to negative police

interaction included a lack of empathy during the initial encounter, which led adults to feel like a criminal:

'Well it was a bit embarrassing to have the police come and take you away. I felt like a criminal, which I'm not, you know, I am just a normal everyday person that maybe just had a bit of a breakdown that's all' (Jane).

'When the police came, I just felt like 'crikey you are treating me like a criminal, like I have done something really wrong'. I was thinking that I didn't kill myself, so I have obviously done something right' (Amanda).

Appearing judgemental or being lectured, rather than the police trying to understand the specificity of the situation caused adults to report feeling intimidated:

'I remember one of them saying "oh you're a nurse" and I said "yeah" and he said "well you should be more responsible". I just thought come on give me us a break. Just buried three of my family, I felt a bit intimidated' (Angela).

'I'm still; this is the first time I've spoken. I never got to talk to anyone. The police had stereotyped me if you like. They were just following procedure not really seeing what they were seeing. In the fact that I was, I had mental health issues. I didn't feel like they treated me like a human,

like a person. They just didn't care' (Jasmine).

Feeling like the police did not care was related to rushing the return process and not allowing the adult reported as missing an opportunity to talk about the specificity of their missing experience. This led to a range of negative emotions:

'It felt like a lecture I was being given by the police as to what they had been doing during the time they tried to find me and who it affected and I didn't need to hear that, that wasn't helpful. Whereas if they had said "right let's talk about where you have been" and just 10 minutes would have made all the difference' (Max).

'I wanted to talk to the police so that to get rid of that feeling of being a criminal. The police seemed to act as if well this is a missing person, we've now got her, and it all seemed to be quick fire questions about where I had been and what I had been up to and it didn't feel like anyone was listening to me. I was answering the questions but they weren't listening to what was going on inside of me' (Amanda).

Feelings of having 'put the police out' contributed to emotions of guilt and shame:

'I think it was a Sergeant or someone. Someone with some authority. And I phoned him up

and his first response was, "where are you, Mr Dennis? We've been looking for you." And I didn't take too kindly to that in the sense that it made me feel like oh, I've put them out' (John).

Although police involvement had the potential to be traumatic, in contrast factors that contributed to positive police interaction were listed as including a high degree of sensitivity, being non-judgemental and demonstrable officer empathy from the outset:

'The police officers were very sympathetic. They took me to the station, I had a cup of tea and cigarette and I was just so relieved to be in protection. They were very sympathetic and I kept saying "sorry I'm wasting your time, you must be busy doing other things". They said "no, it's what we're here for"' (Daniel).

'The police are the soundest. They're the ones that are least judging' (Wilma).

Key messages delivered in a caring way, such as *"it's our job. It's what we are here for, we're just glad that you're safe at home now"*, were extremely powerful at putting adult interviewees at ease during this traumatic time. What many adults report as critical to generating a positive police-adult experience is taking time and acknowledging the specificity of the adult as indicated by Coleen and Caitlin's experiences:

'What sticks out, she just chatted. Not about, "so what were you doing this evening?" just general. I mentioned I had a dog, so she talked about this chocolate lab she was about to get, which calmed me down just not having to think about what was going on and not being left to think about what was going on' (Coleen).

'I spent time with them, had a cup of tea, had a cry, they gave me a lift. When I was with them there was a certain amount of security. One of the policemen was really good, he thought I had mental health. I was obviously depressed. Yeah, he was really understanding and he actually spoke to me really nicely. He understood what was going on' (Caitlin).

Not rushing initial conversations and appearing non-judgemental, but talking with sensitivity about the extent of police search all fed into a caring orientation towards missing journeys:

'It was the Sunday night and the police phoned and had this questionnaire that they wanted me to answer. I think it started to hit then the amount of police that were out looking for me and I realised that other people where so involved and they were nice enough about it. They even said "if you feel down like that you call in the police station and we'll give you a cup of tea and a chat and that"' (Sarah).

Empathy and a sensitive orientation towards an adult's missing journey were

seen as positive by the interviewees and had the potential to aid recovery. The use of humour helped too:

‘They were really nice about it, they came in and just getting me to run through the day, what had happened. They were making a few jokes about trying to lighten it up a bit because they could see how nervous I was. They stayed there for about twenty, thirty minutes with me. And they made sure I was alright. But they put me at my ease. They really did’ (Daniel).

‘Even with the chat they were stern but sensitive but he made me laugh, he put me at ease and he sort of kept talking with me but in a way that was positive for me. He made it very easy for me to relax a little and talk to them and we spoke about other things that helped. I think that all has to contribute to my getting better’ (Sophie).

Police handling of the return is critical to feelings of guilt and shame in the missing person, something that may be important for continuing mental health or repeat missing events and future police contact.

Table 3.14
Summary of affirmative and non-affirmative roles taken by police when managing adults reported missing

Police roles	
Affirmative	Non-affirmative
Non-judgemental	Judgemental
Actions of care	Demonstration of lack of care
Spending time with adults reported missing	By implication ‘criminalising’ adults reported missing
Acknowledging the adults’ journeys	Not listening

SUMMARY

Police contact (93%) is a common part of an adult’s missing journey yet the role and specified features of police routines when managing adults reported missing is unknown and unspecified – ‘a black box’ – for the missing person. Uncertainty and myth around police response to adults reported missing led to feelings of ambivalence, displeasure, surprise and resignation at the involvement of police. Feelings of shock, panic, embarrassment and confusion arise when adults realise they are labelled as a ‘missing person’ by police, a label with which they do not identify. Having the police play a role in the adults’ journeys signified ‘wrong doing’ and being seen in the company of the police was problematic and represented some form of criminalisation in the eyes of the adults. Sensitive and empathetic policing is well valued by the adults interviewed (see Table 3.14).

LEARNING POINT

Trauma is not only associated with being reported as missing, but also relates to communications with police. Effective communication is key to how adults engage with the police and whether they experience further trauma. More work needs to be done to highlight missing experience as a right and officers need to know that they often signify a ‘lack of rights’ within the missing experience. Good communications could have the potential to reduce repeated journeys.



RETURNING:

How can I return?

Unlike previous studies (Biehal *et al* 2003), regardless of the drivers for going absent or the duration reported as missing, all adult interviewees were located or returned and all resumed contact with their families, friends, carers and colleagues. Adults didn't always initially return to their own homes, but by the time they were interviewed they were all back in their original address with the exception of one female who had been re-housed as a result of a prolonged stay in a mental health institution.

Sixty-seven percent of adult interviewees reported thoughts of home when reported as missing. Thoughts ranged from thinking of starting a new life somewhere else and never returning to trying to find a way back and this was summed up by Caitlin, who stated: *'that's the hardest thing, coming home again. Going away is easy.'* Interviewees, both those reported once and repeatedly, expressed apprehension about returning. Unsure about what they were going to return to:

'When you get to that situation and you are about to go back, your mind is thinking about "what am I going to go back to face". It's

just like the whole situation and you get a cramp in your stomach. It makes you feel anxious' (Max).

In interview data we find that adults experience different emotions dependant on who had reported them and the location they were returning to. Often adults express higher levels of guilt when reported missing by family members and returning to the family home compared to mental health institutions. However, feelings about being reported as missing and the actual act of return are not the same. Once return had been prompted and adults were on their way back, anger and confusion at being reported as missing was expressed:

'I was kind of coming out of the fantasy into reality and like you're thinking "oh shit" and I have to deal with all this. Knowing that the police had been looking for me as well I think how is this going to pan out sort of thing. The more I thought about the police, I was starting to get a bit annoyed with [girlfriends name] for having called them in the first place, "what the fuck are you doing, I'm safe why are you calling the police, I'm not missing, I'm coming

home I just couldn't be arsed with you for the weekend'" (Lewis).

As the adults began to further engage with the process of return, feelings of anger in relation towards the loved one who had reported them as missing subsided, but were quite often replaced or ran alongside, for some interviewees, a sense of failure in that nothing had changed by going absent:

'I was numb. I wasn't embarrassed, I didn't feel guilty about what I'd done, it was more, "shit, I haven't done what I wanted to do, failed again" and it was almost as if you had been put back into the same position again. So I hadn't achieved anything by my little run away'" (Caitlin).

The process of actual physical return varied and was provoked by police interactions, running out of steam, a shift in emotions, a need to re-engage in regular routines, being encouraged by friends to contact loved ones or receiving communications from family members:

'It was Christmas, and my son was phoning every night, and he was missing me and so I went back before Christmas' (Agnes).

'I was emotionally shattered and I just wanted to go to bed' (Trish).

'I was rushing trying to get back to them and that I had to try and do it slowly, but I had it in my head that I wanted to see my son on

his birthday and I didn't want him to have his birthday or Christmas without me' (Jasmine).

Return occurred in stages. Some interviewees when located by the police, were taken to a place of safety. Others located by family members experienced initial reactions that can on occasion be fraught: *'I thought "here I go I'm in for it now", he was not particularly unpleasant and then started on, "you've really got to stop this, this is causing pain to me and your wife, my mother", which I didn't blame him for saying really and that was pretty well it' (Andrew).* Others returned directly to their homes or the homes of others before returning for a range of reasons: *'I wouldn't go back to my flat until I felt safe enough to go back to the flat because that was where it started' (Sophie).* Immediate return home was not always an option and for some it had to be negotiated, as Jack explained when returning to his parent's home: *'I went back to my friends and I think it was two more weeks I'd stayed there. I had to ask my dad and my mum was screaming that I couldn't come home, but my dad said "yeah you can come home". I just locked myself in my bedroom for two days so my mum wouldn't see me and chuck me out again'.*

On the whole, however, tired and exhausted adults reported being pleased and relieved to be home:

'I just felt really relieved to go home and having slept on the sofa of your friends, you've hardly got any money and you don't

know when your next, there is no more pay because you don't work so. So it was a relief to know that I had somewhere' (Rhona).

'The relief when I got in the house and saw how my husband was. I just sort of felt it was over, you know, go to bed and put it behind you, which was probably the wrong thing to do because it's not going to go away' (Sarah).

Yet, adults reported uncertainty about what they were returning to socially, materially and emotionally. As previously mentioned twenty-nine percent of adult interviewees lived alone when reported as missing. This meant that for them return home initially might be to an empty house. Where this was the case, adult interviewees spoke about the material trauma of police search and the legacy this leaves:

'It is the most outrageous thing that has ever happened to me. I would have preferred to have been burgled. The room was open, everywhere just stuff on the floor, documents. I know that yes an investigation is part of the investigation process. I understand that. But it was outrageous. I'm still struggling to get over it and I wish and I hope I would love for, in time, in the near future I can get over it' (Mayowa).

Although adults may return to an empty home initially, family members did seek to aid return through the performance of care roles. Yet unsure

how to talk about missing experiences, care-work was often perceived as surveillance and left returned adults often feeling unsupported:

'I was trapped with my dad coming in every morning, "how are you today?". "How do you think?". He would sit there, I would sit here and I didn't know what to say. He didn't know what to say to me and mum she would come up, do the hovering and they just didn't know what to do and I couldn't deal with them either' (Caitlin).

For those adults who returned to households where they lived with others the pressure to explain themselves, when they had not had the chance to reflect, meant that they considered going absent again, and for some this feeling remained after the event:

'Everybody wants you to explain yourself and I couldn't. For days afterwards I was still the same so, you know, it was on the verge sort of 'I can still walk out' I still threaten it' (Trish).

'Probably when I came back. It wasn't the easiest time and it was probably on my mind, the possibility. It has probably crossed my mind also once or twice since, but not really' (Alex).

Interviewees reported keeping a low profile on return, by either going to their bed or remaining inside their houses:

'I went to my bed afterwards. So I feel safe in my bed. It's the thing you'll hear about people underneath a duvet and curled up in a safe place and that's exactly what it was for me. I was sheepish. I was just wanting a very low profile. And just not wanting anyone, especially my parents to make a big deal about it' (John).

As adults struggled to come to terms with their return, pressures of what they had left still remained, some emphasised the importance of understanding in the process of reconnection and return:

'Forgiveness is divine but there is a limit as to how much you can forgive. It all depends on what the person has done but at the end of the day the only thing that I ever wanted was some understanding and my mother couldn't have been any more understanding and it's been a godsend' (Rhona).

For others, recognising the limitations of family members to understand and not feeling they are the best-placed persons to talk too was pronounced. For these individuals having access to an independent ear seemed important, someone outside the immediate family who could listen to them and provide support:

'All I can say is when you come back you have a load of things again that you may not want to face. That pressure is not what someone who wants space and time or disappears wants to have

when they come back. What they want is probably not even family. It's just a mate, you know, a neutral person who doesn't know to just hang out with. I think you need an ear when you get back' (Darren).

Over the days and months that follow, adults reflect on their missing experiences, but have little chance to discuss it:

'Going missing didn't solve anything. If anything it just made everything a lot worse. If I had just stayed and talked things through with the relevant people it may have been okay. But the fact that I left, I just came back to a massive load of, sort of chaos, angry chaos' (Rachel).

'So basically it is a journey to a waste of time. It didn't get anything done or solved or changed. I suppose it taught me that, it was a bit silly to do what I did. That is ridiculous really, but it does teach you that you can't escape from real life' (Mathew).

Also suggesting that: *'perhaps if there had been some sort of system once you had been classed as a missing person they can be a month out of work to really give them time to sort out all their problems and really unwind and think properly. That would help. Say for instant you are ill and you get time off work, it could be classed as that' (Darren).*

We need to acknowledge and

understand that the end of a missing journey for adults reported as missing does not just happen at the point of location or return, rather their journeys can continue well beyond this point. Understanding this is important to aid recovery and help adults gain a perspective on their missing experiences.

SUMMARY

As interviewees returned and resumed contact with their networks they experienced apprehension, anger and confusion about being labelled as a missing person. Initial relief to be back among the familiar was pronounced, but as they embedded back into everyday life, these feelings were replaced by those of failure for many 'returnees'. Many felt they were now under surveillance by their network, and that trust was broken and they experienced pressure to explain themselves, alongside the sense in which talking about missing experience was difficult for all parties. This presented difficulties, as the narrative of their journey was not clear, and interviewees needed support outside the family and friends group as well as space to engage with their own emotions and experience.

LEARNING POINT

Families and friends have an important role to play in recovery and prevention, but more guidance is needed for families and kinship networks on how to respond to a loved one when they return. There are clear support needs for missing adults to help them make sense of their experience and discuss it. Opportunities to talk with professionals might help prevent repeat events.

13

WHAT NEXT?

What happens after I come back?

As Biehal *et al* (2003) reported over 10 years ago, what is most surprising is the general lack of support that adults reported as missing receive to assist reconnection or return home. The present study shows little has changed. We suggest that cultures of talk around missing experiences need to be developed as both a key supportive intervention and prevention strategy. The silence around reported missing experiences is reflected in a tendency for adults who are reported as missing to see their experience as an intensely personal one that they wish to forget, rather than understand and address. As the following accounts reveal, this could be because there is no common language through which to discuss missing experiences. Thus adults are prevented from being able to have conversations in a way that makes sense to them.

The need for longer-term assistance to help adults rebuild their lives focused on shelter, money, housing and employment, as key needs:

'There should really be like, I know there's the missing persons' help line and all this sort of stuff but what can they do? There should

be refuges and shelters for people that need it and there just isn't' (Rhona).

In addition to such assistance, calls for emotional support were highly present in the return narratives of adults and yet, as Table 3.15 shows, on return only twenty-two percent of adults reported being in receipt of support from services.

Table 3.15
Accessing services on return by gender

Accessing services on return	% of adults (n=45)	
	Male	Female
Yes – Support services on return	11%	11%
No – Support services on return	44%	33%

Columns may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Although the police have an important role to play in reconnection and prevention, as discussed previously in this report, adults recognised the police are only one part of this and a multi-agency response is required:

'You want people to understand and the coming home bit, as I've said it's quite hard. You know you need to get your head round why you went in the first place

and why you've had to come back. Why you went in the first place is probably major, so I think any follow-up really needs to be with the individual about why it happened and how they're feeling now for it not to happen again which I don't think is police responsibility' (Caitlin).

Unclear where to access support, the adult interviewees did see the police as key agents in facilitating this. Connecting returned adults with support services – rarely specifically to talk about missing experiences, and more to address the drivers for missing – was sometimes offered by the police either at the time of location or via a letter after the event:

'I understand that the police have to do that and they did recommend some counselling that I could get and they did follow it up. I got leaflets through from Turning Point. So they did follow that up. I am not sure at the time that I would welcome any sort of intervention from anyone else' (Sarah).

Although not all adults wanted to be connected with support services at the time, some did and they were glad when the police offered to facilitate this. However, the police did not always follow through with their promise:

'He said that he would get someone to mediate but that never came about. It was something I was really keen to

look into and because I didn't hear from the police I did contact my doctor. It was just nice that the guy was concerned, but I would rather that he just didn't mention it, you know, either mention it and follow it up or don't mention it at all you know' (Jack).

On return, where service provision was accessed, it was not always in relation to talking about missing experiences, rather it was to assess medication and talk about mental health issues. The chance to talk about missing experiences did not always present itself and interviewees spoke about how they would have benefited from this.

Those interviewees who had no support expressed difficulties in being able to communicate their experiences for sometime after their return and a possibility that they could go missing again featured. Re-integration is made more difficult through a suffocating silence so apparent in this quote from Jasmine, a woman who was missing for over seven months:

'I have walked back into this bubble and tried to be a perfect mother and wife as well and meeting the people I have met on my journey I feel suffocated being here and not being able to talk about my experiences with my husband or anyone really, it's not something you can talk about. I feel trapped, very lonely and suffocated, but I am still sort of recovering. I was away for seven/eight months from school and all

the parents, all the mums know in the playground, but they haven't approached me to ask me where I've been, if I'm well and then I hear on the radio this new campaign, mental health campaign 'don't be afraid ask' and I am not being asked anything'.

In contrast, those that were able to speak about their missing experiences with a councillor or psychiatrist reported positive experiences:

'So I think it helped me a lot. I realised I wasn't the only one and that you didn't have to be down and out or whatever, there was a lot of normal people like myself' (Mathew).

Effective use of agencies is important in recovery and prevention, as this interviewee demonstrates in discussing a helpful conversation with a psychiatrist:

'I had the general need, and it was a need to talk to someone about my experience, and afterwards I had long conversation with the Doctor and the nurses about disappearing and by sharing that with them the burden lifted and the need for it lifted. My mind felt a bit calmer and that really helped' (Amanda).

Not only is talk important, but opening up a space to talk at a pace suitable for the adult is seen as positive to recovery:

'So talking is really important, but

it needs time because I remember being in the room and not being able to talk straight away. Just having this period of silence why I tried to work out what I wanted to say. Then the doctor asked me questions in such a way that it made it easy to open up to him. So I think for anyone else I would say talk to somebody first and see if that can help as it certainly helped me' (Sophie).

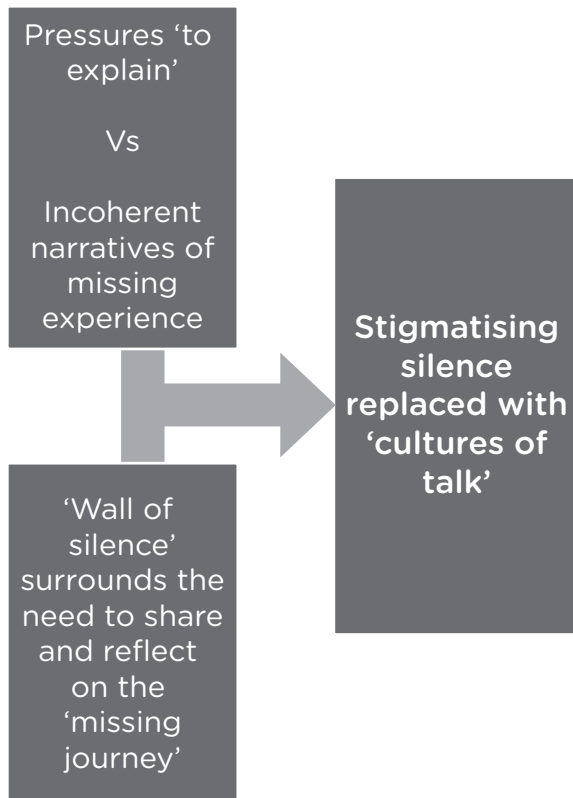
Adults did not always feel that family members were the best or easiest person to talk to about their missing experience. As adults they felt entitled to a private life, as well as not wanting to emotionally burden their families with what they had and were experiencing and a minority sought out therapy: *'I actually did have some therapy for a while. It is easier to do that than talk to people who are closer to you. Now I don't talk about it at all because things are, well I am back to normal really, but you do carry stuff with you, you know, baggage, mental baggage' (Mathew).*

Reflecting on their missing experiences and the support needs post event, adults stated in the main that:

'You don't ever really want the conversation but there's no point in avoiding it. Because if you avoid that conversation then you're just going to do it again. You're either going to do it again or you're going to do something worse. You do have to have the conversation, no matter how bad you feel or

guilty you feel. You have got to talk about it at some point. And even if it's not with your family or to whoever has reported you missing, talk to someone else' (Rhona).

Figure 3.2
Cultures of talk



SUMMARY

It is clear that crisis mobilities have a profound impact on the person and their relationships and that some adults who return are at risk of a repeat episode. Returning is a difficult and confusing emotional event, and with which no one has many resources available to tackle properly. After a certain amount of time has passed, we learn that it is important to talk about being missing, but that there are few opportunities to do so. There is a need to develop appropriate support through advice, information, and support services in ways that address this gap for adults in relation to their missing experiences and as shown in Figure 3.2 (left).

LEARNING POINT

Police and other agencies have a role to play in providing support for return. This needs to be led and informed by the experiences of returned missing adults. Police procedure should have clear guidance on which agencies to refer missing adults to at first point of contact and who can deliver support services to adults. Returned missing people could be referred to existing services provided either by the police or by NGO's. Cultures of talk need to replace the current stigmatising silence that exists around missing experience.

14

MISSINGNESS & IDENTITY:

Am I a missing person?

It is widely recognised that whilst family members have the right to report their absent family member missing, so do adults have the right to go missing and remain absent provided they are not at risk. Yet quite often those reported as missing do not self identify with this label as Table 3.16 ‘Am I a missing person?’ shows and this quote illustrates:

‘I suppose it’s that old joke, I know where I am. But because I didn’t actually think I was missing, I wouldn’t class myself as missing. I was surprised’ (Megan).

‘missing people’ are often portrayed as a stereotype in the media, or as individuals who meticulously plan their disappearance and reinvent themselves elsewhere. Furthermore the focus on missing children and young people’s experiences obscures the voices of adults:

‘In my mind, you get the idea of children missing or teenagers going missing and you don’t actually realise that middle aged and old people go missing too. And I have still got that classic view of the missing kid’ (Malcolm).

Table 3.16
Am I a missing person?

Am I a missing person?	% of adults (n=45)	
	Male	Female
Yes	13%	13%
No	40%	31%
Unknown	2%	0%

Columns may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Who has the right to label an adult missing is an important question. Being labelled as missing was traumatic for the adults reported and the loss of control to talk about their experiences in a way that was meaningful for them added to the trauma:

‘I didn’t intend to go it was traumatic as you can imagine. I mean, [being] reported missing. But I had no intention of going missing in the first place’ (Innes).

There are a variety of reasons why adults do not self identify with the term ‘missing’. One such reason is that adults reported as missing might be absent from their daily lives, but as they move along their journeys adults anchor themselves in place and time. Another reason is that

The interviewees more readily identified with terms, such as ‘running

away', 'disappearing, 'going absent' and 'taking time out':

'I didn't feel like I was a missing person because I had chosen to be, to leave my home. I was just running away from problems and I didn't think that I was a missing person' (Mathew).

'I never really considered myself a missing person it's just a label that never came into my head, I just felt more like I was a depressive who attempted suicide, vulnerable adult, I think I'm that more than a missing person' (Sophie).

'I don't actually consider myself missing it's not wanting to be found, not missing, not lost or anything like that, just not wanting to be found for a while' (Amanda).

A possibility for why other terms are more acceptable is that they do not threaten or disturb a person's biography as much as the label of 'missing person'. Therefore, taking 'time-out, 'getting-away' and so on allows more scope for return and less biographical disruption. Those leaving to commit suicide also rarely identified with the label 'missing':

'In my particular case I am missing with a purpose, but quite a few people are missing because they don't want to be found. You know, I'm missing because I want to actually kill myself' (Malcolm).

'I was just completely gobsmacked. I thought bloody hell and also thinking I'm an adult and if I want to go away for a few days and not really let people know too much about what I am doing then I should be allowed to do it' (Megan).

Trying to understand and recover from the stressful triggers that make people feel so vulnerable that they have to disappear and the experiences they have on their journeys are masked by a perceived stigma that exists around what it is to be a 'missing adult?' The experience of stigma and feelings of shame caused adults to feel distressed at being labelled as 'missing', while they themselves have a different perception of their circumstances. As well as the experience itself, the experience of stigma makes it hard to talk about and this has a profound effect on adults for many years after the event.

SUMMARY

Adults reported missing are absent from their daily lives, but are still present in time and space, and this may account for why they do not identify with the label missing. Being redefined in their absence evoked in adults a sense of loss of control, whereas terms that did not disrupt their identity allowed greater scope for return. The perceived stigma as to what it means to be labelled a 'missing person' prevents adults talking about their experience and this has a long-term effect.

LEARNING POINT

Raising public awareness through developing cultures of talk and providing resources that help with this is important and need to be recognised by everyone who might be involved in missing journeys from families, to mental health services, to the police, to the Missing People charity, to the media.

CHAPTER 4



SUMMARY &
RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report has been to present the geographies of missing experiences through the voices of returned missing adults. An attempt has been made to identify not just why a person gets reported as missing, but to provide a deeper exploration of *where* they go when reported as missing and *how* they make decisions in relation to their geographies. This section of the report will provide some initial pointers that may help future policy and practice in relation to missing persons, their families, friends and the agencies involved.

The study was based on forty-five face-to-face interviews with returned missing adults contacted via Police Scotland and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). The findings are based on a self-selecting sample of adults and so cannot address the full range of missing experiences. However, the diversity of interviewees taking part and the research methodology – in-depth face-to-face interviews – has helped to ensure that for the first time ever we have been able to generate valuable insights into the geographies of missing adults from their own perspective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Delivering ‘prevention, protection and provision’ (Home Office 2011) in support of missing adults and those affected by their disappearance will

require a range of local and national partners working together with adults who have experienced being reported as missing in order to effect change.

PROTECTION

‘The one thing that’s important is the fact that you are actually doing research because there is a need for it. If the police read your research properly then it may help them adapt how they respond to people. And if they do that then it might make it easier for a lot of people who go missing. It might make it easier for them to say “Okay, the police are okay”.’
(Amanda).

As has been seen, the diverse population that go missing and the situations in which adults go and then return is likely to require a multi-agency response. Furthermore, strategies for prevention may not always be feasible or desirable. Adults, in most circumstances – unless seen as a risk to themselves or others – have a right to leave although if reported and investigated as missing this right becomes a responsibility to make themselves known to the police. Thus, being reported as missing does not just have implications for missing adults, but also for the police and others left behind (Holmes 2008; Parr *et al* forthcoming).

Initiatives around missing issues need to address raising public awareness and developing a platform for talk

on missing issues that may help to generate a greater sensitivity and make it easier for both adults who get reported as missing and their families and friends to ask for help. Further promoting 'talk don't walk' campaigns may help encourage both adults who are thinking of going missing to stay and talk, whilst also encouraging others to be receptive to hearing this conversation.

Embedding specific information about local and national services that are available to help adults within the fabric of daily life is of critical importance. Adults need signposting to statutory and voluntary services that can assist with the difficulties that they are experiencing before they go missing. However, this is not always possible and those that leave in response to crisis and attempt to access services received very little 'formal' support whilst away. For many, they had no idea what services were available or where to turn for support. Well-publicised information about services that can help adults' reported as missing immediate as well as longer term needs are required. It is important that publicity about being missing encompasses the full spectrum of missing experience and thus advertising support should recognise that adults rarely identify with the label 'missing person' and terms such as 'getting away, time out, disappeared, running away' hold more resonance.

The primary aim of this study has been to explore the geographies of missing adults. In doing so the authors have identified important experiences

both short and long-term missing persons have during these crisis mobilities. A better understanding of missing geographies should aid a wide range of agencies to respond to missing experiences. The report also points to the value of questioning people for in-depth information about geographical preferences and routines and to think laterally about an adult's personal geographies. A better understanding of decision-making behaviours during times of missing crisis, the ways that adults use the natural and physical environments as resources, the risks they face when missing and how feelings of guilt, shame and disappointment permeate narratives of return, comprises useful resources for search agents. An improved awareness of adults missing geographies and their experiences can help statutory agencies and service providers, of whatever kind, to develop new service provisions that are tailored to people reported as missing. Identifying appropriate geographical locations for publicity, being attuned to the spaces and places of missingness, and targeting interventions appropriately and sensitively maybe be one of the most valuable services that can be provided.

PROVISION

Until recently, missing persons research has been a much-neglected area. Adult experiences still remain under-researched. Developing provision strategies requires account to be taken of the multiple needs of

missing adults, which are responsive to adult voices of experience (for further insights see Parr and Stevenson 2013). Missing issues cut across a wide range of social policy areas including family, education, the police, health and social care. At present there is no overall strategy to ensure the integration of policies and services for adult missing persons. To ensure that the needs of adults reported as missing are met there needs to be clear policy direction that facilitates the sharing of information and partnership working between statutory and voluntary agencies. Partnership responses need to go beyond tracking the missing disappearance itself and seek to limit the long lasting effect that going missing can have on the lives of those involved. This is essential if an effective response is to be achieved. The Home Office is taking a lead in establishing a multi-agency response during the period in which persons are missing and seeking to provide clarity to agency roles and responsibilities for local authorities and the police. The UK National Missing Persons Bureau within the Serious Organised Crime Agency is the lead Government agency for policy on missing persons and provides professional operational support services to police forces; they also have lead responsibility for the Strategic Oversight Group (SOG), which looks at strategic issues relating to the reduction of missing person's incidents via evidence based research and practice. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) have recently reviewed and updated the definition of missing and continue to provide police with policy and procedural guidance for how to respond to

missing persons enquiries. However, there is still much more to do that elevates missing adults beyond a statistic, and to acknowledge their specificity within such policy and practice arenas in ways that enhance provision for needs before, during and after the missing journey.

PREVENTION

The police are one of the key agencies tasked with responding to missing persons. There is evidence that this response is variable, but police handling of the return is critical to feelings of guilt and shame in the person reported as missing and something that may be important for continuing mental health or repeat missing events and police contact. A key opportunity for the police to engage with the person and maybe prevent a repeat episode is through a sensitive and emphatic orientation to their journey via a 'safe and well check'. We suggest that any police check at this moment could have different preventative functions, such as:

- » 'safe and well check' with referral to other agencies
- » 'safe and well check' with sensitive and emphatic orientation to their journey
- » 'safe and well check' script to prevent repeats or as a method of gathering data.

We suggest that a few minutes spent at point of location could be value-

added investment for police resources in that it can do good community work and involve a process of co-production between the police and person reported as missing around prevention of future episodes of missing as well as the opportunity for referral to other agencies. A further intervention point that could lead to prevention is a two-week follow up visit performed by a volunteer or NGO representative. Visiting returned missing people in their homes or other locations, such as hospital wards, in plain clothes and unmarked vehicles to gather information on adults missing journeys and to talk and listen to them about their experiences, as well as connect them with appropriate services would carry value. Further, ACPO, the Serious Organised Crime Agency and Police Scotland could require police forces routinely to inform returned missing people of the range of support services available to them. Support on return would aid prevention, but strategies for measuring such prevention intervention are needed.

The broad spectrum of adults who get reported as missing means that agencies working across different sectors are likely to encounter people who are reported as missing or at risk of becoming so. In many areas of policing formal protocols have already been developed to guide response and facilitate formal co-operation between the police, social services and voluntary organisations. Closer working relationship with hospitals could further promote an effective response as missing adults often presented in these locations

whilst reported as missing. Further missing awareness campaigns should be aimed at health agencies – GP's, mental health services, hospitals – to help them become more attuned to the warning signs, to recognise who may be, or become, missing amongst their client group and to develop a sensitive language around missing issues for all involved. Finally, services that are 'adult missing' centred and provide both practical and therapeutic support would be welcomed.

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TECHNICAL APPENDIX

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study of adults reported missing drew a sample from two police force databases. Issues of access and ethics were important from the framing of the research proposal and throughout the data collection.

ETHICS

This research was carried out in line with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow granted full ethical approval. During the project the participants have been afforded confidentiality, all gave informed consent to take part, and were free to withdraw from the process at any time without having to give a reason.

As the police service were partners in the recruitment process this presents ethical challenges around confidentiality and anonymity for those who wish to take part as well as legal issues for the police in relation to data protection. To limit these complexities and take seriously the

issue of confidentiality it was made clear to interviewees that whilst the researchers were being introduced through a police letter they were not police officers and simply working *through* the police service rather than *for* them.

All interviews were conducted in light of ethical guidelines issued by the project funder – Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) – and prior findings about how to approach writing on trauma and loss (Fravel *et al* 1992; Boss, 1999; 2002; DePrince *et al* 2006). Extra care was taken to address the worries and concerns of respondents who revealed that they have or have had mental health problems. Researchers requested information about the health status of the person at the time of disappearance, but it was made clear that health status disclosure was optional. To further safeguard interviewees' rights, a third party contact within the University of Glasgow and both police forces was made available to study participants in case they wanted to speak about their participation and the issues raised.

Finally, the benefits to returned missing adults of taking part in the research was identified not only by the authors, but also by interviewees

themselves as they valued opportunities to talk about a profound life-event. The notion of research interviews providing ‘serendipitous therapy’ has been raised by others (Morse, 1994 in Lowes and Gill, 2006; Holmes 2008), and is an important factor in balancing risk with the importance and usefulness of the research outcomes.

RESEARCH SITES

The selection of the Grampian region in the North East of Scotland and London Metropolitan region is driven by an interest in comparison between the experiences of, and response to, missing people in different social and geographical environments. The Grampian region is semi-rural and semi-urban, with mountains to the west and rivers to the east. It has an estimated population of 426,000 and contains Aberdeen, Scotland’s third largest city (Aberdeenshire Council 2013). This contrasts with London, the UK capital, with a population of 8 million, which accounts for 12.5% of the UK total population. London has an extensive transport network, as well as the river Thames running through its centre (London Councils 2013). Two of the thirty-two London boroughs participated in the research, Islington and, Hammersmith and Fulham, and were recommended by the MPS police partner as they represent boroughs with ‘average missing person profiles’.

GENERATING THE SAMPLE & NEGOTIATING ACCESS

The project is qualitative and therefore cannot seek to be representative of all missing adults’ experiences. Further, the method of postal recruitment via letters meant that those who responded determined the final sample, although procedures were put in place to invite a range of adults to participate (as discussed in the proceeding sections).

All participants were sampled from Police Scotland and MPS missing person databases. The size of the particular missing person database differed in each region. In Police Scotland, the sample was generated from missing person cases from the Grampian region only. MPS has thirty two London boroughs and a sample was generated of all adults reported as missing to the London boroughs of Islington and, Hammersmith and Fulham and across all MPS boroughs for post-fourteen day missing persons.

The sample frame was developed in consultation with both police forces and excluded cases for under 18 year olds, those with dementia, forced missing, incomplete addresses or no fixed abode and where a hospital address was given but no home address. To maximise participation rates, we did not sample for particular time frames other than to proactively sample for 100% of post-fourteen day cases to ensure that the project had the opportunity to potentially interview longer-term missing persons. The UK

Missing Persons Bureau also provided the police partners with longer-term cases for each force from their own records.

In each force the researchers were allocated a designated police point of contact to send a standardised letter to a relevant sample of returned missing persons within a pre-defined period. For Police Scotland this was 2009 and 2010 and in MPS it was 2011. The letter provided potential participants with full details of the research and consent forms along with a self-addressed envelope for return direct to the research team if willing to participate in the research.

A two-stage recruitment strategy was enacted. For stage one a letter, written by the police, was sent to the selected sample introducing the project and project researchers, and noting compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998. The letter was accompanied in the same envelope by an information sheet for the project and a consent form on University-headed note paper. Potential respondents were directed to contact the member of police staff involved in facilitating the research or the university Research Fellow for further information and clarification. The names and addresses of the persons receiving the invitation to join the research project were not known nor held by the Research Fellow in the first instance and it was only if the adult replied directly to the Research Fellow with their details that they could be contacted. Stage two followed exactly the same process and a follow up letter was sent out in the same

way, two weeks later. Those who had already expressed an interest in taking part or those who had declined were excluded from receiving a follow-up letter.

In Police Scotland, for Grampian region, a total of 1400 letters from the police were sent to individuals reported missing in 2009 and 2010. A repeat letter was sent to those reported missing in 2010 only. The rationale for this was to capitalize on adults proximity of missing experience to the interview period i.e. the potential to remember more details as the experience had happened in the near past. For the MPS, 1972 letters were sent out to the returned missing 2011 sample. The same procedure was followed in MPS as in Police Scotland, but for a different time period. The reasons for generating a sample in MPS from 2011 cases only was the number of reported cases was higher for London than Grampian. Also reflecting on the methodology employed in Police Scotland, it became clear that our earlier assumption with regards to memory - that some distance from the event was important for reflection, but that too much meant a loss of detail - was borne out in interviews. Therefore the decision to draw only a sample from 2011 cases in the MPS was taken. The total response for Police Scotland was forty-three and MPS was twenty-one giving an overall response rate of 1.8 percent. There is likely to have been multiple reasons that might have deterred the sample population from taking part in this research, such as receiving a letter from the police along with project information or not

identifying with the term 'reported as missing' and possibly a different access strategy would have delivered a different response. However, as missing people cut across all sectors of society and there is no single agency that represents their needs, this was the most logical and robust access route available within the parameters of the project. The significant effort to gain just under two percent response rate from such a high volume sample reflects the difficulty in accessing adults reported as missing and further reflects the importance of this work.

Negotiating access was complex and designed to respond to the needs and rights of potential participants through a multi-staged process. From the 64 adults who completed a reply slip, all were telephoned by the Research Fellow within a week of receipt of a reply slip for an initial conversation. When telephone contact was achieved the Research Fellow explained the project again and what it might involve, asked if they had any questions, answered these and talked through the next steps should they still like to be involved. If still keen, a follow up letter was issued which outlined in extensive detail information about the study, including information on: confidentiality; background to the research; what an interview would entail; what will happen to the interview material; likely media interest; their rights as a participant and how to get in touch. A follow-up telephone conversation ensued and it was only at this stage, if appropriate, that arrangements to conduct a face-to-face interview at a time and in a location of the adults

choosing were made and an interview set up.

Although attempts were made to contact sixty-four adults, forty-five interviews with adults aged 18 years and over took place. This was because: 1) not everyone was contactable, 2) some adults were currently hospitalised and didn't want to take part, and 3) some were confused and wanted clarification as to why they had been contacted. In relation to the latter point, people were directed back to the police contact who was able to give them information on the specifics of their case. Of all those that were spoken to at the initial telephone stage who agreed or felt they were in a position to participate, a 100 percent retention rate was maintained.

Of the forty-five adults aged 18 years and over, who were reported missing during 2009 - 2011, twenty-nine were based in Grampian and sixteen in London. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in a location chosen by the interviewee. Fourteen females and fifteen males were interviewed in Grampian and seven females and eight males in London. The age profile of the adults reported as missing who participated in the research is one 18-21 year old, eighteen 22-39 year olds, twenty-four 40-59 year olds, one 60-79 year olds, and one for whom age was unknown. Within the sample (n=45) thirty had been reported missing once, and fifteen on more than one occasion. Twenty-four of the adults had returned or were located within forty-eight hours from the time they were reported as missing, and nine were missing for more than seven days. All interviewees resumed contact.

INTERVIEW TOPICS & INTERVIEWS

Each interview covered a range of topics, which are listed below as they appeared on the interview topic guide. The interview topic guide was developed by the research team based partly on conceptual drivers, existing police safe and well checks and in consultation with the project advisory group comprising national experts in the field of missing persons. Topics and associated questions related to the aims of the project were directly designed to ensure relevant service delivery and included:

- » Going missing: leaving
- » Possessions/objects
- » Journey making
- » Encounters
- » Transport/tracking
- » Communication
- » Thoughts of 'return'
- » Being found/returning
- » Thresholds/moments
- » Communication
- » Emotions
- » Repeat missing episodes
- » Police interactions and learning
- » Interventions/helplines
- » Agencies
- » Impact
- » Other issues

In total forty-five interviews with returned missing adults were conducted during 2011 and 2012. The first two interviews were conducted as a pilot phase. For the pilot interviews, an in-depth interview, facilitated by a semi-structured approach,

was assumed in order to sense the suitability of the interview schedule. It was apparent during this phase that the structure of the schedule was too long and too rigid with interviewees mentioning topics before they appeared in the schedule.

Subsequent interviews followed a semi-structured style, but with a contextual and open starting point, so that the adults could start their story where it was most appropriate for them. The 'story' was allowed to dominate the structure of the interview, and the interviewer worked with this, 'returning' to component parts of the narrative to focus in on the 'journey' (whatever form that took) to ask core questions identified under each topic. In-depth interviews were planned with each direction of questioning being always supplemented by 'how' and 'why' follow-up questions to enable in-depth responses. Examples were asked for at multiple points, but leading questions, (e.g. 'naming emotions' that could have been felt) were avoided. The questions were designed to be broad and open, inviting semi-structured narrative responses.

Each interview lasted between one and a half and two and a half hours. Interviews were conducted in a way that suited the interviewee: either at home or a public place at a time that suited them with the vast majority of interviewees wishing to meet at home. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded on a digital recorder with the permission of the respondent, and later transcribed verbatim. All interview data have

been anonymised and confidential as standard. All names within this report and other project materials are pseudonyms.

The potential for interviewees to become distressed during interviews was recognized. This was limited by a sensitive orientation towards the interviewees needs. At the beginning of interviews participants were informed of their rights and made aware that they didn't have to speak about topics or disclose any information that they felt uncomfortable in so doing. Further, interviews were taken at the adults pace with built in breaks and pause points with the option to stop altogether to mitigate for potential long lasting harm. Interviews were often emotional and involved public displays of anger, tears etc. and required a high degree of empathy on the part of the interviewer. In spite of this, all interviewees thanked the Research Fellow for providing the opportunity to talk about their experience of being reported as missing in a sensitive and caring way, often commenting that no one had asked them about their experience in this way before and it was good to talk. Finally, a debrief took place after interviews to discuss any upsetting memories that might have been unearthed in the process and an information leaflet with sources for support and local resources available was issued to every participant.

MAPS

To help understand the events that happened and the missing adult's experience of them, participants were asked to draw a sketch of their missing journey(s). We were clear that this was not a test of their drawing abilities and provided prompt questions to help develop the maps. These were: where they left from and where returned to; things and routes that was important and had meaning; how travel was enacted; places that were familiar or if/when lost; comments at significant spatial and temporal points, and descriptions of emotions.

Initially, study participants in Grampian were asked to complete these maps after the interview and return them to the Research Fellow via a pre-paid postal envelope. Some interviewees refused on the spot providing a range of reasons – 'it's like art therapy', they didn't see the point, 'don't like drawing' – but for those that agreed only one person returned a completed map. A revised strategy was devised for the MPS where the mapping exercise was incorporated into the interview process and example maps were shown. Participants were informed at the start of the interview and invited to ask questions. They were informed that it was not a test and nor did they have to take part. Either at the end of the interview or at another appropriate point the adults were asked to complete the mapping exercise. They were also offered to sketch the map together with the researcher helping or on their own. After the sketch was

complete, a conversation was had around what had been drawn to illicit further descriptions of journey points. Of the sixteen possible participants, fourteen took part with two refusing on the grounds they didn't know what to draw or it was too much like art therapy. Maps served as a prompts for eliciting further journey narratives rather than as a standalone tool and so, rather than by content analysis, mapping discussions have been analyzed within the interview transcript.

GRAPHS & TABLES

Graphs and charts based on data abstracted from interview transcripts illustrate the narrative accounts and demonstrate how qualitative and quantitative data can be used to create understanding. By representing the attributes of the sample population (n=45) in percentages we can create a visual picture and provide another dimension to the data that words alone cannot. However, it must be remembered that the purpose in quantifying the data is to help understand what took place within these sample populations and they should not be abstracted so as to make claim that the findings relate to the total population of *all* adults reported missing. The value in the numerical data provided in this report is that it helps those who may wish to build on this initial research project. A marker has been placed in this research arena, which can guide other researchers and those agencies

responsible for reported missing adults and their families in considering the most appropriate practices and use of resources.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Interviews were coded and explored using QSR NVivo8. Initial interview coding involved breaking the data into units of analysis based on *a priori* codes, which were developed on the basis of discussions within the research team, discussion with the advisory group, analysis of geographical and missing literatures and driven by the content of a subset of the interviews. These initial codes were then reformulated through a process of analytical induction, whereby provisional themes were refined as more interviews were analysed. Interviews already coded were revisited where appropriate. After a lengthy coding process, data from the interviews were analysed thematically, to explore qualitatively the associations between different journeys and duration, gender, mental health and number of missing episodes. A context sensitive analysis identified information for policy and practice relevant research findings and conceptual categorizations for theoretical writing. Thematic analysis described here led to the development of key socio-spatial components of missing journeys and these are reflected in the report structure.



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for Policing Research

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Printed by University of Glasgow Print Unit.

Designed by academic|Digital <www.academicdigital.co.uk>